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Honoré de Balzac
LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE
VOLUME XLII

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The Human Comedy

PHILOSOPHIC
AND ANALYTIC STUDIES

VOLUME II

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THE ELIXIR OF LONG LIFE

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Honoré de Balzac *NOW FOR THE
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TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH*
JESUS CHRIST IN FLANDERS
MELMOTH CONVERTED THE
MAYOR OF LONG LIFE SERAPHITA
BY G. BURNHAM TUES

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WITH EIGHT ETCHINGS BY RICARDO DE LOS RIOS, AFTER
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IN ONE VOLUME
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JESUS CHRIST IN FLANDERS

TO MARCELINE DESBORDES-VALMORE

To you, a daughter of Flanders, and one of its recent glories, I dedicate this simple tradition of Flanders.

DE BALZAC.



At a somewhat indefinite period of Brabantine history, communication between the island of Walcheren and the shores of Flanders was maintained by a small vessel intended for the transportation of passengers. Middleburg, the capital of the island, at a later period so famous in the annals of Protestantism, contained only two or three hundred houses. Wealthy and prosperous Ostend was an unknown seaport, flanked by a hamlet sparsely inhabited by a few fishermen, by poor tradesmen, and by unmolested pirates. Nevertheless, the hamlet of Ostend, comprising about a score of houses and three hundred cabins, huts, or hovels built with the débris of shipwrecked vessels, enjoyed a governor, a militia, a gallows, a convent, a burgomaster, in fact, all the symbols of advanced civilization. Who reigned at that time in Brabant, in Flanders, in Belgium? On that point, tradition is silent. Let us confess at once that this narrative is materially affected by the vagueness, the uncertainty, the admixture of the supernatural with which the favorite orators of Flemish festivals frequently interlarded their commentaries, whose poetic forms are as diverse as their details are contradictory. Told by generation after generation, repeated from fireside to fireside day and night by the old men, by the minstrels, this chronicle received a different coloring from each age. Like

those monuments constructed according to the caprice of the architectural systems of each epoch, black, defaced masses which, nevertheless, delight the souls of poets, it would drive commentators, sifters of words, facts, and dates, to despair. The narrator believes it, as all the superstitious folk of Flanders have believed it, without thereby betraying greater learning or greater weakness of intellect. As it is impossible to reconcile all the versions, here is the story, stripped, it may be, of its romantic simplicity, which cannot be reproduced, but with its bold deeds which history disavows, with its moral lesson which religion approves, its strain of mysticism, a flower of the imagination, its hidden meaning which the wise man may interpret to suit himself. To every man his chosen pasturage and the task of sorting the good grain from the chaff.

The boat that carried passengers from the island of Walcheren to Ostend was about to leave the village. Before casting off the iron chain by which his boat was made fast to a stone of the little pier where his passengers embarked, the skipper blew several blasts on his horn to summon those who were behind time, for that was his last trip. Night was approaching, by the fading gleams of the setting sun one could barely make out the Flemish coast and distinguish the forms of the belated passengers, wandering along the earthen walls which surrounded the fields or among the tall reeds in the swamps. The boat was full; someone called out:

“What are you waiting for? Let us start!”

At that moment, a young man appeared a few steps away from the pier; the pilot, who had neither seen him nor heard his footsteps, was much surprised at his sudden appearance. He seemed to have risen suddenly from the earth, as if he were a peasant who had lain down in a field awaiting the hour of departure, and had been awakened by the horn. Was he a thief? was he an officer of the customs or police? When he reached the pier at which the boat was moored, seven persons who were standing at the stern hastily took seats on the benches, so that they might be by themselves and not allow the stranger to join them. They acted in obedience to a swift, instinctive thought, one of those aristocratic thoughts that come to the minds of the rich. Four of these persons belonged to the oldest nobility of Flanders. First of all, a young cavalier, accompanied by two beautiful greyhounds and wearing upon his long hair a round cap adorned with precious stones, clashed his gilded spurs and twisted his moustache impatiently from time to time, casting contemptuous glances at the rest of the ship's company. A haughty young woman held a falcon on her wrist and spoke with no one but her mother and an ecclesiastic of high rank, evidently their kinsman. These four made a great noise and talked together as if they were alone on the boat. Nevertheless, close beside them was a man of great importance in the country, a stout burgher of Bruges, wrapped in a great cloak. His servant, armed to the teeth, had placed two bags of gold by his side.

Next to them, again, was a man of learning, a doctor at the University of Louvain, attended by his clerk. These people, who severally looked down on one another, were separated from the bow of the boat by the bench of rowers.

As the tardy passenger stepped aboard, he cast a rapid glance at the stern, saw that there was no room there, and went to seek a place among those who were in the bow. They were poor people. When they saw a bareheaded man, whose brown camlet coat and short-clothes and starched shirt-front were without ornament, who had neither cap nor hat on his head, neither sword nor purse in his girdle, they all took him for a burgomaster sure of his authority, a kindly, gentle-natured burgomaster like some of those old Flemings whose ingenuous characters have been so faithfully portrayed for us by the painters of the country. The poorer class of passengers therefore greeted the stranger with demonstrations of respect which gave birth to whispered raillery among the people at the stern. An old soldier, a man of toil and of fatigue, gave his place on the bench to the stranger, seated himself on the boat's rail, and maintained his balance by his manner of resting his feet against one of the wooden cross-pieces which connect the floor-boards of a boat, like the bones of a fish. A young woman, the mother of a little child, apparently belonging to the working-class of Ostend, moved aside to make more room for the new-comer. The movement implied neither servility nor disdain, it was one of those acts of

courtesy by which poor people, who know by experience the value of a slight favor and the pleasures of fraternal intercourse, reveal the frankness and naturalness of their hearts, so artless in the manifestation of their good qualities and their defects; and so the stranger thanked them with a gesture full of dignity. Then he took his seat between the young mother and the old soldier. Behind him were a peasant and his son, the latter a boy of ten. A poor woman, old and wrinkled, dressed in rags, with an almost empty wallet, a perfect type of reckless misery, was lying in the bow, curled up on a great pile of ropes. One of the rowers, an old sailor who had known her when she was lovely and rich, had taken her aboard, in accordance with the admirable expression of the common people, *for the love of God*.

"Thank you, Thomas," the old woman had said; "I'll say two *Paters* and two *Aves* for you in my prayers to-night."

The skipper blew the horn for the last time, cast his eye over the silent fields, threw the chain into the boat, ran along the rail to the stern, seized the tiller, and stood there as the boat drew away from the pier; then, after looking up at the sky and when they were in clear water, he shouted to his rowers in a ringing voice:

"Pull, pull hard and fast! The sea has a squally smile, the old hag! I feel the swell in the way the rudder moves, and the wind in my old wounds."

Those words, in the jargon of the sea, a language

intelligible only to the ears that are accustomed to the noise of the waves, gave to the oars a hurried but always rhythmical stroke; a united movement, as different from the previous style of rowing as a horse's gallop is from his trot. The aristocrats at the stern took pleasure in watching all those brawny arms, those brown faces with eyes of fire, those strained muscles, and those diverse human forces acting in concert to ferry them across the strait for a trifling toll. Far from deploring their poverty, those people called one another's attention laughingly to the grotesque expressions which the exertion imparted to their distorted features. In the bow, the soldier, the peasant, and the old woman gazed at the oarsmen with the sympathy natural to persons who, as they live by toil, are familiar with the intense suffering and feverish fatigue it causes. Moreover, being accustomed to life in the open air, they all realized from the appearance of the sky the danger that threatened them, and therefore they were all serious. The young mother rocked her child in her arms, crooning an old church hymn to soothe him to sleep.

"If we get there," said the soldier to the peasant, "the good Lord will show that He's obstinate about letting us live."

"Oh! He's the Master," interposed the old crone, "but I think it's His pleasure to call us to Him. Look at that light over yonder!"

With a movement of her head, she pointed to the west, where bands of flame stood out vividly against

a bank of brown, red-edged clouds which seemed on the point of setting free a furious gale. The sea made a dull, muttering sound, a sort of inward rumbling, not unlike the voice of a dog when he growls. But, after all, Ostend was not far away. At that moment, sky and sea presented one of those spectacles to which it is impossible, perhaps, for painting, as for poetry, to give a longer duration than they really have. Human creations demand striking contrasts. So it is that artists generally seek at Nature's hands its most gorgeous phenomena, despairing doubtless of their ability to interpret the grand and beautiful poesy of its everyday aspect, although the human mind is often as deeply moved in calm as in confusion, by silence as by the tempest. There was a moment when everyone on the boat was silent, gazing at sea and sky, whether from a presentiment, or in obedience to that religious melancholy which seizes almost all of us at the hour of prayer, at nightfall, at the moment when Nature is silent and the church-bells speak. The sea cast a white, pale reflection, changing, however, and not unlike the colors of steel. The sky was generally of a grayish hue. In the west were long narrow bands like waves of blood, while in the east, gleaming lines, as sharply defined as if drawn by a fine pencil, were separated by dark clouds lying in folds, like wrinkles on an old man's forehead. Thus on all sides, the sea and sky had a sombre look, all in half-tones, which threw into bold relief the ominous flames of the setting sun. That aspect of Nature

inspired a feeling of deep awe. If it were permissible to import the bold metaphors of the common people into written language, we might repeat what the soldier said, that "the weather was on the run," or what the peasant replied, that "the sky looked like a hangman." The wind suddenly sprung up from the westward, and the skipper, who had not taken his eyes from the water, seeing the swell rising on the horizon, cried out:

"Hold hard! hold hard!"

At that cry, the oarsmen at once ceased rowing and lay on their oars.

"The skipper's right," said Thomas, coolly, when the boat, after rising to the crest of a huge wave, rushed down as if into a deep abyss opened by the sea.

At that extraordinary movement, at that sudden outburst of wrath on the part of old Ocean, the passengers at the stern turned pale as death and uttered a piercing shriek:

"We are lost!"

"Oh! no, not yet," rejoined the skipper, calmly.

At that moment, the clouds were torn asunder by the wind directly over the boat. The gray masses having spread out with ominous celerity to east and west, the twilight gleam fell full upon the boat through the rift made by the storm and enabled the passengers to see one another's faces. Noble and wealthy, sailors and paupers, all alike were struck dumb with amazement at the aspect of the last comer. His golden hair, parted in two bands above

His serene and placid brow, fell in numberless curls over His shoulders, outlining against the gray atmosphere a face of sublime sweetness, wherein the divine love shone resplendent. He did not despise death, He was certain of not dying.

But, although the people at the stern forgot for a moment the implacable fury of the tempest that threatened them, they soon reverted to their selfishness and their life-long habits.

"That stupid burgomaster is very fortunate not to see the danger that threatens us all! He sits there like a dog and will die without distress," said the professor.

He had barely given expression to that seemingly just sentiment when the tempest set free its legions. The wind blew from all directions, the boat whirled about like a top, and the water came in.

"Oh! my poor child! my poor child!—Who will save my child?" cried the mother, in a heart-rending voice.

"You yourself," replied the stranger.

The clear note of that voice entered the young mother's heart and planted hope therein; she heard that comforting word despite the howling of the gale, despite the shrieks of the passengers.

"Blessed Virgin of Succor, who dwellest at Antwerp, I promise you a thousand pounds of wax and a statue if you bring me safely out of this!" cried the burgher, kneeling on his sacks of gold.

"The Virgin is no more at Antwerp than she is here," observed the professor.

"She is in heaven," said a voice that seemed to come from the sea.

"Who can it be that spoke?"

"It was the devil!" cried the servant, "he is making fun of the Virgin of Antwerp!"

"Drop your Blessed Virgin," said the skipper to the passengers. "Just take these buckets and bale out the boat.—And you fellows," he added, turning to the oarsmen, "row steady! We have a moment's lull; in the name of the devil who lets you stay in this world, let's be our own providence.—This little channel's an infernally dangerous place, as everyone knows, and I've been crossing it these thirty years. Is to-night the first time I have fought a gale?"

Then, standing at the helm, the skipper continued to look at his boat, the sky, and the sea, in succession.

"He always laughs at everything, does the skipper," said Thomas, in an undertone.

"Will God let us die with those wretches?" the haughty young woman asked the handsome young nobleman.

"No, no, noble lady.—Listen!"

He drew her toward him, and said in her ear:

"I know how to swim, but do not mention it! I will take you by your lovely hair and carry you safely to the shore; but I can save none but you!"

The young woman looked at her aged mother. She was on her knees asking absolution for something from the bishop, who was not listening to her. The chevalier read in his lovely mistress's eyes a

faint trace of filial affection, and said to her, in a hollow voice:

“Submit to the will of God! If it is His will to call your mother to Him, doubtless it will be for her welfare—in the other world,” he added, in a still lower tone.—“And for ours in this,” he thought.

The Lady of the Rupelmonde possessed seven fiefs besides the Barony of Gâvres. The young woman listened to the voice of her life, the interests of her love speaking through the mouth of the handsome adventurer, a young miscreant who haunted the churches in search of a victim, a marriageable girl or good hard cash. The bishop blessed the waves and bade them be calm, but with little faith; he was thinking of his concubine who awaited his coming with a delicious repast, who at that moment, perhaps, was going to the bath, perfuming herself, arraying herself in velvet, or fastening the clasps of her necklaces and jewels. Far from thinking of the power of the Holy Church and giving comfort to the Christians about him by exhorting them to trust in God, the wicked bishop intermingled worldly regrets and words of love with the sacred words of the breviary. The gleam that lighted up those pallid faces made visible their widely-differing expressions when the boat was lifted high in air by a wave, then hurled down to the bottom of the abyss, then shaken like a fragile leaf, the plaything of the north wind in the autumn, and its hull cracked and groaned and seemed on the point of going to pieces. Then there were frightful cries

followed by frightful pauses. The attitudes of the persons seated in the bow contrasted strangely with those of the rich and powerful passengers. The young mother strained her child to her breast each time that the waves threatened to engulf the fragile bark; but she trusted to the hope that the stranger's words had planted in her heart; each time she turned her eyes toward that man and derived from His face renewed faith, the steadfast faith of a weak woman, the faith of a mother. Living in the Divine Word, in the words of love let fall by Him, the simple creature awaited with confidence the execution of that species of promise, and hardly dreaded the peril. Glued to the gunwale of the boat, the soldier kept his eyes fastened upon that strange being, modelling the expression of his own rough, bronzed face upon His impassive expression, by exerting his intelligence and his will, whose vast energies had been somewhat impaired during a passive, automatic sort of life; with a jealous determination to appear as calm and undisturbed as that man of higher courage, he ended by identifying himself, unknowingly, perhaps, with the secret principle of that inward power. Thereupon his admiration became a sort of instinctive fanaticism, a love without bounds, a firm faith in that man, like the enthusiasm soldiers feel for their leader, when he is a man of powerful character, surrounded by the glamour of victories and the glorious prestige of genius. The poor old crone said in a low voice:

“Ah! vile sinner that I am! have I suffered enough

JESUS CHRIST IN FLANDERS

*Therupon the stranger with the luminous visage
spoke to that little world of sorrow:*

*"Those who have faith shall be saved! let them
follow Me!"*

*He stood erect and walked with a firm step upon
the waves. Instantly the young mother took her
child in her arms and walked beside Him.*

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"Ah! vile sinner that I am! how polluted enough

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JESUS CHRIST IN FLANDERS

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to atone for the pleasures of my youth? Ah! wretched woman, why did you lead the joyous life of a courtesan, why did you squander God's belongings with men of the Church, and the belongings of the poor with usurers and excisemen?—Ah! I have sinned grievously.—O my God! my God! let me end my hell on this abode of misery!”

Or else:

“Blessed Virgin, Mother of God, have pity on me!”

“Console yourself, mother, the good Lord is no usurer. Although I may have killed right and left, good and bad alike, I'm not afraid of the resurrection.”

“Ah! my fine officer, how lucky those fine ladies are to be with a bishop, a holy man!” rejoined the old woman; “they'll get absolution for their sins. Oh! if I could hear a priest's voice say: ‘Your sins shall be forgiven,’ I would believe it!”

The stranger turned toward her, and his kindly glance made her tremble.

“Have faith,” he said, “and you shall be saved.”

“May God reward you, kind gentleman,” she replied. “If you tell the truth, I will make a pilgrimage, barefooted, to Notre-Dame de Lorette, for you and for myself.”

The two peasants, father and son, held their peace, resigned and submissive to the will of God, like men accustomed to follow instinctively, as animals do, the impulse imparted to their natures. Thus, on the one side, wealth, pride, learning, debauchery, crime,

an epitome of human society as it is constituted by the arts, reflection, education, the world and its laws; but also, on that side only, shrieks, terror, a multitude of varying feelings wrestling with horrible doubts; there, and there only, the agony of fear. Next, towering above those creatures, a powerful man, the master of the boat, doubting nothing, the leader, 'the fatalistic king, making himself his own providence by crying: "Blessed Bucket!" instead of "Blessed Virgin!"—in short, defying the storm and struggling with the sea breast to breast. And at the other end of the boat—the weak!—the mother rocking on her breast a little child who smiled at the storm; a prostitute, once joyous and careless, now in the clutches of horrible remorse; a soldier riddled with wounds, with no other reward than his mutilated body for a life of unwearying devotion: he had hardly more than a crust of bread wet with tears, yet he laughed at everything and went his way without care, happy when he was drowning his glory in a pot of beer, or narrating his glorious exploits to children who followed him admiringly; gayly he entrusted to God the care of his future;—and lastly, two peasants, men of labor and fatigue, toil incarnate, the labor by which the world lives. Those simple creatures cared nothing for thought and its treasures, but were ready to bury them in a belief, their faith being the more robust in that they had never discussed or analyzed it; virgin natures wherein the conscience had remained pure and the sentiment powerful; remorse, misfortune, love, toil, had

exercised, purified, concentrated, redoubled their will, the only thing in man which resembles what scholars call a soul.

When the boat, guided by the wonderful skill of the skipper, was almost in sight of Ostend and only fifty paces from the shore, she was blown off by a fierce squall and instantly foundered.

Thereupon the stranger with the luminous visage spoke to that little world of sorrow:

“Those who have faith shall be saved! let them follow Me!”

He stood erect and walked with a firm step upon the waves. Instantly the young mother took her child in her arms and walked beside Him. The soldier suddenly arose, saying in his artless language:

“Ah! *nom d’une pipe!* I’ll follow You to the devil.”

Whereupon, with no indication of surprise, he walked upon the sea. The old woman, believing in God’s omnipotence, followed the man and walked upon the sea. The two peasants said to themselves:

“As they walk upon the water, why should not we do as they do?”

They rose and hurried after them, walking upon the sea. Thomas tried to imitate them; but as his faith wavered, he fell several times into the sea and rose again; at last, after three trials, he walked upon the sea. The bold skipper clung like a barnacle to a plank from his boat. The miser had faith and rose; but he tried to take his gold, and his gold

dragged him to the bottom of the sea. Making sport of the impostor and the imbeciles who listened to him, the professor, when he heard the stranger propose to the passengers to walk upon the waves, began to laugh and was swallowed up by the Ocean. The young woman was dragged down into the abyss by her lover. The bishop and the old lady went to the bottom, heavy with crimes, perhaps, but even heavier with incredulity, with confidence in false images; heavy with false devotion, but unburdened by alms-giving and true religious feeling.

The little troop of true believers who trod with a firm tread and dryshod the plain of angry water heard the awful roaring of the gale about them. Enormous waves broke upon their path. An invincible force rent the Ocean. Through the spray the faithful espied in the distance, on the shore, a small, faint light twinkling in the windows of a fisherman's hut. As they walked courageously on toward that glimmer, each fancied that he heard his neighbor crying above the roaring of the waves: "Courage!" And yet not one of them said a word, for all were intent upon their danger. Thus they came safely to the shore. When they were all seated by the fisherman's fire, they looked in vain for their luminous Guide. From the summit of a rock against whose base the tempest tossed the skipper, clinging to his plank with the strength that sailors put forth in their combats with death, THE MAN went down, rescued the almost lifeless castaway; then He said, stretching out a helping hand over his head:

“For this time ’tis well, but tempt not fate again; ’twould be too evil an example.”

He took the sailor on His shoulders and bore him to the fisherman’s hut. He knocked at the door, so that that humble place of refuge might be thrown open to the unfortunate man; then the Saviour disappeared. On that spot the convent of *La Merci* was built for shipwrecked sailors, and there for many years one might see the footprints that the feet of Jesus Christ had made, so it was said, upon the sand. In 1793, at the time of the French invasion of Belgium, the monks carried away that priceless relic, the evidence of the last visit Jesus made to earth.

There it was that I, weary of life, found myself some time after the Revolution of 1830. If you had asked me the cause of my despair, it would have been well-nigh impossible for me to tell it to you, my mind had become so limp and flaccid. The springs of my intellect relaxed before the blasts of the westerly wind. A black frost descended from the sky, and the dark clouds that passed over my head gave nature a sinister look; the vast expanse of the sea—everything said to me: “Whether death comes to-day or to-morrow, must one not die?—and then—” I strayed about, therefore, thinking of an uncertain future, of my disappointed hopes. A prey to such depressing thoughts, I mechanically entered the church of the convent, whose gray towers loomed like phantoms through the mist from the sea. I gazed without enthusiasm at that forest of pillars whose leafy capitals sustain the slender arches—a

graceful labyrinth. I walked heedlessly through the lateral naves which spread out before me like porticoes turning on their own axes. The uncertain light of an autumn day enabled me to see but dimly the carved keystones of the arches, the delicate tracery that outlined so clearly the angles of all the graceful rafters. The organs were silent. Only the sound of my footsteps awakened the solemn echoes hidden in the dark chapels. I seated myself by one of the four pillars which support the dome, near the choir. From that point my eyes embraced the whole interior of the structure, which I gazed upon without a thought for my surroundings. The mechanical movement of my eyes alone showed me the impressive labyrinth of all those pillars, the immense carved rose-windows, suspended like network, as if by miraculous means, above the lateral doors and the main portal, the galleries high in air where slender columns separated the windows, surmounted by arches, by trefoil or by flowers, a lovely filigree in stone. At the end of the choir a dome of glass sparkled as if it were constructed of precious stones set with great skill. To right and left, in contrast with that dome, which was of white and colored glass in alternate rows, were the deep shadows of the two long naves, in whose depths could be seen indistinctly the shafts of a hundred gray columns. As I gazed at those marvellous arches, those arabesques, those garlands, those spirals, those Saracenic fantasies, inextricably interlaced with one another, and all lighted by a weird light, my perceptions became

confused. I found myself, as it were, on the dividing line between illusion and reality, caught in the snares of optical delusions, and almost bewildered by the multitude of different points of view. Insensibly the carved stones became indistinct, I saw them only through a cloud composed of golden dust like that which darts about in the bands of light formed by a sunbeam in a room. In the midst of that vaporous atmosphere which made all outlines vague, the lace-work of the rose-windows suddenly shone forth resplendent. Each delicate nerve and line, each trivial detail, gleamed like burnished silver. The sun kindled fires in the panes of glass, whose rich colors sparkled gayly. The pillars swayed, their capitals moved gently to and fro. A caressing shudder shook the edifice and its friezes moved with cautious grace. Several large pillars went through divers solemn evolutions like the motions of a dowager who obligingly walks through a quadrille at the close of a ball. Some straight, slender columns began to laugh and gambol, arrayed in their wreaths of trefoil. Pointed arches collided with the long, narrow windows, which resembled the ladies of the Middle Ages who wore their family crests painted on their dresses of cloth of gold. The dance of those mitred arches with those coquettish windows was like a combat in the lists. Soon every stone in the church began to vibrate, but without changing its position. The organs spoke and filled my ears with divine melody, with which were mingled angels' voices, music of incredible sweetness, accompanied by

the deep bass of the bells whose ringing indicated that the two colossal towers were swaying on their solid foundations. That strange witches' Sabbath seemed to me the most natural thing on earth, for I am not easily surprised after having seen Charles X. overthrown. I was myself swayed gently as if I were sitting in a swing, which gave me a sort of nervous pleasure, but it would be impossible for me to describe it. And yet, in the midst of that scene of glowing excitement, the choir of the church seemed to me as cold as if winter were reigning there. I saw there a multitude of women dressed in white, motionless and silent. A number of censers exhaled a sweet perfume which penetrated my soul and rejoiced it. The tapers burned brightly. The reading-desk, gay as a minstrel in his cups, leaped like a Chinese hat. I discovered that the cathedral was whirling round and round so swiftly that everything remained in its place. The colossal Christ, from His place above the altar, smiled at me with a malicious kindliness that made me afraid, and I looked away from Him to gaze in admiration at a bluish vapor stealing among the pillars in the distance and imparting an indescribable charm to them. Several fascinating female figures in the friezes moved their limbs. The cherubs who upheld great pillars flapped their wings. I felt myself uplifted by a divine power which plunged me into infinite joy, a sweet and languorous ecstasy. I believe that I would have given my life to prolong the duration of that phantasmagoria, but suddenly a shrill voice cried in my ear:

“Wake up and follow me!”

A withered old woman took my hand and made my nerves tingle with a horrible sensation of cold. Her bones were visible through the skin of her pallid, almost greenish-hued face. The cold little old creature wore a black dress that dragged in the dust, and had at her neck something white which I dared not examine. Her staring eyes were fixed on the sky so that only the whites could be seen. She led me through the church, marking her path with the ashes that fell from her dress. As she walked, her bones rattled like a skeleton's. Step by step, as we proceeded, I heard behind me the tinkling of a little bell, whose jangling notes rang in my brain like those of a harmonica.

“You must suffer! you must suffer!” it said to me.

We left the church and passed through the vilest streets in the city; then she took me into a gloomy house, crying in a voice as harsh and discordant as that of a cracked bell:

“Defend me! defend me!”

We ascended a winding staircase. When she knocked at a door in the shadow, a man, dumb like the familiars of the Inquisition, opened it. We found ourselves in a room hung with ragged old tapestry, full of old linen, faded muslins, and gilded copper.

“Here is everlasting wealth,” she said.

I shuddered with horror, when I saw plainly, by the light of a long candle and two tapers, that the woman must recently have come forth from the

cemetery. She had no hair. I tried to fly; she put out her skeleton arm and surrounded me with a circle of iron armed with spikes. At that movement a cry uttered by millions of voices, the cheer of the dead, echoed around us.

"I intend to make you happy forever," she said. "You are my son!"

We were sitting by a fireplace in which the ashes were cold. The little old woman held my hand in such a strong grasp that I was compelled to remain there. I gazed fixedly at her and tried to divine the story of her life by scrutinizing the rags in which she crouched by my side. But was she alive? That was a veritable mystery. I saw clearly that she must once have been young and lovely, adorned with all the charms of simplicity, a veritable Grecian statue with the spotless brow.

"Aha!" I said, "now I recognize you. Unhappy woman, why did you prostitute yourself to men? At the age when passions enslave, you became rich, you forgot your pure, sweet girlhood, your sublime self-sacrifice, your innocence, your fruitful faith, and you abdicated your original power, your intellectual supremacy, for the powers of the flesh. Abandoning your linen vestments, your couch of soft moss, your grottoes illumined by divine rays, you preferred to shine resplendent in diamonds, in luxury, in lust. Audacious, proud, desiring everything, obtaining everything, and overturning everything in your path, like a popular courtesan hurrying to her pleasures, you were as sanguinary as a queen

dazed by arbitrary power. Do you not remember that you were stupefied at times, then suddenly remarkably clear-sighted, after the pattern of Art coming forth from a debauch? Poet, painter, songstress, fond of splendid ceremonials, you patronized the arts only from caprice, and so that you might sleep beneath magnificent hangings. Did you not one day, in your capricious insolence,—you who should be chaste and modest,—force everybody to bow down to your slipper, and fling it at the head of sovereigns who had earthly power, wealth, and talent? Forever insulting man, and taking pleasure in seeing how low human folly would stoop, sometimes you would bid your lovers walk on all fours, give you their property, their treasures, their wives even, when they were of any value! Without motive you have ruined millions of men, you have driven them like sand-clouds from West to East. You have descended from the lofty heights of thought to take your seat beside kings. Woman, instead of consoling men, you have tortured, afflicted them! You demanded blood, sure of obtaining it! And yet you might have been content with a little flour, brought up as you were to eat cakes and put water in your wine. Original in everything, you once forbade your famished lovers to eat, and they did not eat. Why did you carry your extravagance so far as to wish for the impossible? Why, like a courtesan spoiled by her adorers, did you rave over idiotic trifles and refrain from undeceiving those who explained or justified all your errors? At last, you

came to the end of your passions. Terrible as the love of a woman of forty years, you roared aloud! you sought to clasp the whole universe in a last embrace, and the universe that belonged to you escaped you. Then, after the young men, old men came to your feet, impotent creatures who made you hideous. Nevertheless, some men with the keen eye of the eagle said to you, with a glance: 'You shall die without renown because you have deceived, because you have broken your promises as a girl. Instead of being an angel with peaceful brow, instead of sowing light and happiness along your pathway, you have been a Messalina, fond of the circus and of orgies, abusing your power! You can never again be a virgin, you must have a master. Your time has come. You already feel the hand of death. Your heirs think you rich, they will kill you and obtain nothing. Try at least to throw aside those clothes of yours, which are no longer in fashion, and become what you once were. But no! you have committed suicide!'—Is not that your story?" I said to her in conclusion; "old, decayed, toothless, chilly, forgotten now, and unobserved as you pass? Why do you live? Why wear your soliciting garb which arouses no one's desire? Where is your fortune? why have you squandered it? Where are your treasures? What noble thing have you done?"

At that question, the little old woman stood erect on her bones, threw off her rags, increased in stature, emerged smiling and resplendent from her black

chrysalis. Then, like a new-born butterfly, that tropical creature came forth from her palms, appeared before me a fair, young girl, clad in a robe of spotless linen. Her golden hair fell over her shoulders, her eyes sparkled, a luminous cloud enveloped her, a circle of gold fluttered about her head; she waved her hand toward space, brandishing a long sword of fire.

"See and believe!" she said.

Suddenly I saw in the distance tens of thousands of cathedrals like the one I had just left, but decorated with pictures and frescoes; I heard entrancing music. Myriads of men swarmed around those edifices like ants in their ant-hills; some eager to save books and copy manuscripts, others ministering to the poor, almost all studying. From the heart of those unnumbered multitudes arose colossal statues, reared by them. By the strange light cast by a luminary as great as the sun, I read on the pedestals of those statues: SCIENCE. HISTORY. LITERATURE.

The light went out, I found myself once more alone with the young woman, who gradually resumed her lifeless envelope, her mortuary rags, and became old once more. Her familiar brought her a little coal-dust to renew the ashes in her foot-warmer, for the weather was cold; then he lighted for her—for her who had had myriads of wax-candles in her palaces—a little night-lamp, so that she could read her prayers during the night.

"Faith is dead!" she said.

Such was the critical situation in which I beheld

the most beautiful, the most immense, the truest, the most fruitful of all powers.

“Wake up, monsieur, they’re going to close the doors,” said a hoarse voice.

Turning my head, I saw the repulsive face of the dispenser of holy water; he had shaken me by the arm. I found the cathedral buried in darkness; like a man wrapped in a cloak.

“To believe,” I said to myself, “is to live!” I have just seen the funeral procession of a monarchy; we must defend the CHURCH!”

Paris, February 1831.

MELMOTH CONVERTED

TO MONSIEUR LE GENERAL BARON DE POMMEREUL

In memory of the unbroken friendship which united our fathers, and which still subsists between their sons.

DE BALZAC.

*

There is one variety of the human race which civilization produces in the social régime, just as florists create in the vegetable régime, by the hot-house method, a hybrid species which they are unable to reproduce either from seeds or by grafting. That variety is the cashier, a genuine anthropomorphic product, watered by religious ideas, nourished by the guillotine, pruned by vice, which grows to maturity in a third-floor apartment, between an estimable wife and tiresome children. The number of cashiers in Paris will always be a problem to the physiologist. Did anyone ever understand the terms of the proposition of which the known X is a cashier? To find a man who must be always in presence of wealth, like a cat in presence of a mouse in a cage? to find a man who has the faculty of sitting on a cane-seated chair in a box with a wire grating, where he has no more room to walk than a ship's officer in his state-room, for seven or eight hours a day during seven-eighths of the year? to find a man whose knees and spinal column will not become anchylosed at that trade? a man who is great enough to be small? a man who can acquire a distaste for money by dint of handling it? Apply for such a specimen to any religion, any code of morals, any college, any institution on earth, and mention Paris, that city of temptations, that training-ground for hell, as the

place in which the cashier is to be planted! Ah! well, the religions will all appear in single file, colleges, institutions, moral codes, all human laws, great and small, will come to you as an intimate friend comes when you ask him for a thousand-franc note. They will put on a mournful expression, they will make faces, they will point to the guillotine, as your friend will point to the usurer's place of business, one of the hundred doorways to the alms-house. Nevertheless, moral nature has its whims, it ventures to produce honest men and honest cashiers now and then. And the pirates whom we dignify by the name of bankers, and who take a license at three thousand francs as a privateer takes his letters of marque, have such veneration for those rare products of the incubation of virtue, that they shut them up in cages in order to keep them safe, as governments keep curious animals. If the cashier has imagination, if the cashier has passions, or if the most perfect of cashiers loves his wife and that wife is bored, or ambitious, or simply vain, the cashier goes to pieces. Search the annals of the counting-room: you will not find a single instance of the cashier attaining what is called *a position*. They go to the galleys, they go abroad, or they vegetate in a second-floor apartment on Rue Saint-Louis in the Marais. When Parisian cashiers have reflected seriously upon their intrinsic value, a cashier will be beyond price. It is certain that certain men can never be aught else than cashiers, just as others are incorrigible rogues. Strange civilization! Society awards virtue an annuity of a

hundred louis for its old age, lodgings on the second floor, plenty of bread, a new cravat or two, and an old wife encumbered by her children. As for vice, if it has a little insolence, if it can circumvent an article of the Code as cleverly as Turenne circumvented Montecuculli, society legalizes its stolen millions, bestows decorations upon it, stuffs it with honors, and overwhelms it with tokens of high consideration. Moreover, the government is in harmony with this profoundly illogical society. The government levies upon youthful intellects, between eighteen years and twenty, a conscription of precocious talents; it exhausts by premature toil the powerful brains which it convokes in order to sort them out on a board as gardeners do their seeds. It provides for that process sworn weighers of talents who test brains as gold is tested at the mint. Then out of the five hundred heads excited by hope, with which the most enlightened portion of the population annually provides it, it selects one-third, stows them away in great bags called its *Schools*, and shakes them about there for three years. Although each of those grafts represents an enormous capital, it makes cashiers of them, so to speak; it appoints them engineers in ordinary; it employs them as captains of artillery; in a word, it assures them all the highest places in the subordinate grades. Then, when those picked men, fattened on mathematics and stuffed with science, have reached the age of fifty years, it provides them, by way of reward for their services, with the third-floor apartment, the wife burdened

with children and all the joys of mediocrity. If, of that deluded multitude, five or six men of genius escape and climb to the social summits, is it not a miracle?

The foregoing is an accurate balance-sheet of the account between talent and virtue on the one side and the government and society on the other, in an age which deems itself progressive. Without these preliminary observations, an episode of recent occurrence in Paris would seem improbable, whereas, in the light of this summary, it may, perhaps, attract the attention of minds of sufficient acumen to have divined the real plague-spots of our civilization which, since 1815, has replaced honor as a principle of action by wealth.

On a gloomy autumn day, about five in the afternoon, the cashier of one of the strongest banking-houses in Paris was still at work by the light of a lamp which had already been lighted for some time. In accordance with the usages and customs of the commercial world, the counting-room was situated in the darkest part of a narrow, low entresol. To reach it one must pass through a corridor lighted by inside windows and extending the length of the various offices whose ticketed doors resembled those of a bathing establishment. At four o'clock, the concierge had phlegmatically announced, according to his orders: "The counting-room is closed." At this time, the offices were deserted, the mail despatched, the clerks had gone home, the wives of the partners were awaiting their lovers, the two bankers were dining with their

mistresses. Everything was in order. The place where the strong-boxes were kept in an iron safe was behind the grated box of the cashier, who was engaged, no doubt, in balancing his cash. The open wicket permitted one to see a closet of hammered iron, which, thanks to the discoveries of modern locksmithing, was so heavy that burglars could not have carried it away. The door opened only at the bidding of the person who could write the password, the secret of which is faithfully kept by the letters of the lock beyond the reach of corruption, a beautiful realization of the *Open, Sesame!* of the *Thousand and One Nights*. But that was not all. The lock would strike a crushing blow at the face of the man who, having discovered the password, was unacquainted with the last secret, the *ultima ratio* of the dragon of the mechanism. The door of the room, the walls of the room, the shutters at the windows of the room, the whole room, in short, was sheathed with sheet-iron plates a third of an inch thick, disguised by a thin veneer of wainscoting. The shutters were closed, the door was closed. If ever a man might believe that he was absolutely alone and sheltered from all eyes, that man was the cashier of the house of Nucingen and Company, Rue Saint-Lazare. The most profound silence reigned in that iron cave. The dying fire in the stove gave forth the sickening warmth which produces upon the brain the clammy sensation and queasy uneasiness peculiar to the day after a debauch. The stove tends to produce sleep, it stupefies and helps materially to

banish the wits of concierges and clerks. A room with a stove is a mattress in which man's energy disappears, his nerves relax, and his will becomes null. The department offices are the great nursery of the mediocrities which governments require for the maintenance of the feudal authority of money, upon which the present social fabric rests.—See *The Civil Service*.—The mephitic heat produced by the herding of men together in those offices is not one of the least important causes of the progressive degeneration of intellects; the brain from which the most nitrogen is set free asphyxiates the others in the end.

The cashier was a man of about forty years, whose bald head gleamed in the rays of the Carcel lamp that stood on his table. The light shone upon the white hairs interspersed with black that formed a fringe around his head, to which the rounded outlines of his face gave the appearance of a ball. His complexion was brick red. His blue eyes were surrounded by wrinkles. He had the plump hand of the corpulent man. His blue coat, slightly worn in places, and the folds of his shiny trousers offered to the eye that appearance of decay which long use imparts, against which the brush struggles in vain, and which gives superficial persons an exalted idea of the economical habits and unswerving probity of a man who is enough of a philosopher or enough of an aristocrat to wear old clothes. But it is no rare thing to find people who will haggle over trifles, easily imposed upon, extravagant or incapable in the momentous affairs of life.

MELMOTH AND CASTANIER

Then he had taken his pen and had forged, at the bottom of each of them, the signature Nucingen. Just as he was examining those false signatures to see which of them all was the most perfect imitation, he raised his head as if he had been stung by a gnat, obeying a presentiment which cried out in his heart: "You are not alone!"

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MELMOTH AND CASTANIER

Then he had taken his pen and had forged, at the bottom of each of them, the signature Nucingen. Just as he was examining those false signatures to see which of them all was the most perfect imitation, he raised his head as if he had been stung by a gnat, obeying a presentiment which cried out in his heart: "You are not alone!"

MELMOTH AND CASTANIER

Then he had taken his pen and had forged, at the bottom of each of them, the signature *Nucingen*. Just as he was examining those false signatures to see which of them all was the most perfect imitation, he raised his head as if he had been stung by a gad, obeying a presentiment which cried out in his heart: "You are not alone!"

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The cashier's buttonhole was adorned with the ribbon of the Legion of Honor, for he had commanded a company in the dragoons, under the Emperor. Monsieur de Nucingen, who was an army contractor before becoming a banker, had been so situated as to discover his future cashier's delicacy of feeling, having met him in an exalted position from which misfortune had dislodged him; and he testified his regard by paying him a salary of five hundred francs per month. This soldier had been a cashier since 1813, when he was cured of a wound received at the battle of Studzianka, during the retreat from Moscow, after he had languished six months at Strasburg, whither a number of the officers of higher rank had been carried, by order of the Emperor, to receive special attention. The ex-dragon, Castanier by name, had the brevet rank of colonel and a retiring pension of twenty-four hundred francs.

Castanier, in whom the cashier had in ten years vanquished the military man, possessed the banker's confidence to such an extent that he also superintended the clerks in the private office behind his counting-room, to which the baron came down from his apartments by a secret staircase. There important affairs were decided; there was the sieve in which propositions were sifted, the parlor in which the plans were scrutinized; thence letters of credit issued; lastly, there were the ledger and the journal wherein the work of the other offices was summarized. After closing the door at the foot of the staircase leading to the State office, where the

two bankers were usually to be found, on the first floor of their hôtel, Castanier had returned to his seat and had glanced for a moment at several letters of credit drawn on the house of Watschildine at London. Then he had taken his pen and had forged, at the bottom of each of them, the signature *Nucingen*. Just as he was examining those false signatures to see which of them all was the most perfect imitation, he raised his head as if he had been stung by a gnat, obeying a presentiment which cried out in his heart: "You are not alone!" and the forger saw behind the grating, at the wicket of his counting-room, a man whose breathing was inaudible, who seemed to him not to breathe at all. He had evidently entered by the door leading into the corridor, which Castanier saw was wide open. The ex-soldier experienced for the first time in his life a sensation of fear which made him sit with gaping mouth and bewildered eyes, staring at the intruder, whose appearance was, in truth, horrifying enough to stand in no need of the mysterious circumstances attending his entrance. The oblong shape of the stranger's face, the bulging outline of his forehead, the acid tinge of his complexion, indicated an Englishman, no less than the cut of his clothes. The man fairly smelt of the Englishman. Seeing his tightly-buttoned coat, his flowing cravat colliding with a rumpled shirt-frill, its whiteness intensifying the fixed, livid hue of an impassive face, whose cold, red lips seemed made to suck the blood from dead bodies, one could imagine the black gaiters

buttoned above the knee, and the rest of the semi-Puritan costume of a wealthy Englishman out for a walk. The flash emitted by the stranger's eyes was insupportable and caused a painful impression which was heightened by the rigidity of his features. Thin and gaunt, the man seemed to have within him a devouring principle which it was impossible for him to satisfy. He must have digested his food so rapidly that he could eat incessantly, without causing the slightest trace of a flush ever to appear on his cheeks. He could swallow a cask of the Tokay wine known as *vin de succession*, and his piercing glance, which read men's minds, would not waver for an instant, nor his pitiless logic, which seemed always to go to the very root of things. There was in him something of the fierce and tranquil majesty of the tiger.

"Monsieur, I have just received this bill of exchange," he said to Castanier, in a voice which put itself in communication with the cashier's nerves and assailed them all with a violence comparable to that of an electric discharge.

"The counting-room is closed," replied Castanier.

"It is open," said the Englishman, pointing to the safe. "To-morrow will be Sunday, and I cannot wait. The amount is five hundred thousand francs, you have it in the safe, and I owe it."

"But how did you manage to get in?"

The Englishman smiled, and his smile terrified Castanier. Never was a fuller or more peremptory response than the imperious, disdainful curl of the

stranger's lip. Castanier turned, seized fifty packages of bank-notes each containing ten thousand francs, and, as he passed them to the stranger who had tossed him a bill of exchange signed by Baron de Nucingen, he was attacked by a sort of convulsive trembling, at sight of the red gleam that issued from that man's eyes and shone upon the forged signature of the letter of credit.

"You—haven't—signed—a receipt," stammered Castanier, returning the bill.

"Pass me your pen," replied the Englishman.

Castanier handed him the pen he had used for his forgeries. The stranger signed JOHN MELMOTH, then returned the pen and paper to the cashier. While Castanier was looking at the stranger's writing, which ran from right to left in the oriental fashion, Melmoth disappeared, and made so little noise that, when the cashier raised his head and saw that he was no longer there, he uttered a sharp cry, conscious of a pang like those which our imagination attributes to the effects produced by poison. The pen Melmoth had used caused a burning, disturbing sensation in his vitals, like that produced by an emetic. As it seemed impossible to Castanier that the Englishman had divined his crime, he attributed that internal suffering to the palpitation which, according to received ideas, follows a *mauvais coup* the moment after it is committed.

"Damnation! what a fool I am! God help me, for if that animal had applied to these gentlemen to-morrow, my goose would have been cooked!" said

Castanier to himself, as he threw the forged letters he did not propose to use into the stove, where they were consumed.

He placed a seal on the one he had selected for use, took from the safe five hundred thousand francs in bills and bank-notes, locked it, put everything in order, took his hat and umbrella, extinguished the lamp after lighting his candlestick, and went tranquilly, according to his custom when the baron was absent, to hand one of the two keys of the safe to Madame de Nucingen.

"You are very fortunate, Monsieur Castanier," said the banker's wife, when he entered her apartments, "we have a holiday on Monday; you can go into the country, to Soisy."

"Will you be kind enough, madame, to say to Nucingen that the bill of exchange from Watschildine, which was delayed, has been presented. The five hundred thousand francs are paid. So I shall not return until Tuesday, about noon."

"Adieu, monsieur; a pleasant time to you."

"The same to you, madame," replied the old dragoon as he went out, glancing, as he spoke, at a young man then much in vogue, named Rastignac, who was supposed to be Madame de Nucingen's lover.

"Madame," said the young man, "that stout old party looks to me as if he proposed to play some trick on you."

"Nonsense! it's impossible, he's too big a fool."

"Piquoizeau," said the cashier, going into the

porter's lodge, "why do you let anybody come up to the counting-room after four o'clock?"

"Ever since four o'clock," said the concierge, "I've been smoking my pipe on the doorstep, and not a soul has gone into the offices. No one has even left but these gentlemen—"

"Are you sure of what you say?"

"Sure as I am of my own honor. Just about four, Monsieur Werbrust's friend came, a young man from Messieurs Du Tillet and Company, Rue Joubert."

"All right!" said Castanier, hastily leaving the lodge.

The nauseating heat which his pen had communicated to him assumed greater intensity.

"Ten thousand devils!" he thought, as he hurried along Boulevard de Gand, "have I made my arrangements wisely? Let us see! Two days to myself, Sunday and Monday, then a day of uncertainty before they begin to look for me—that gives me three days and four nights. I have two passports and two distinct disguises; isn't that enough to throw the cleverest detectives off the scent? Tuesday morning, I will pick up a million in London, before they have begun to have a suspicion of me here. I leave my debts for the benefit of my creditors, who will put a P. over them, and for the rest of my days I will live happily in Italy, under the name of Comte Ferraro, that poor colonel whom I alone was with when he died in the swamps of Zembin, and whose skin I will put on.—Ten thousand devils! this woman that I am going to take with me may lead to my being

recognized. An old campaigner like me tied to a petticoat, bewitched by a woman! why should I take her?—I must leave her. Yes, I shall have the courage to do it. But I know myself, I shall be just fool enough to come back to her. However, no one knows Aquilina. Shall I take her? or shall I not take her?”

“You will not take her!” said a voice that stirred his entrails.

Castanier turned abruptly and saw the Englishman.

“So the devil is taking a hand in it!” exclaimed the cashier aloud.

Melmoth had already passed his victim. Although Castanier’s first impulse was to fasten a quarrel upon a man who could read his thoughts so readily, he was tossed about by so many contrary sentiments that the result was a sort of temporary inertness; so he walked on as before, and relapsed into the fever of thought natural to a man excited by passion to the point of committing a crime, but lacking the strength to carry its burden without the most cruel agitation. And so, although determined to gather the fruit of a crime half consummated, Castanier still hesitated to carry out his undertaking, like most men of mixed character in whom there is as much strength as weakness, and who may resolve to remain pure as well as to become criminal, according to the effect of the most trivial circumstances. In the motley collection of men enlisted by Napoléon there were many who, like Castanier, possessed the

purely physical courage of the battle-field, but lacked the moral courage which makes a man as great in crime as he might be in virtue. The letter of credit was so worded, that on his arrival in London he could draw twenty-five thousand pounds sterling from Watschildine, the correspondent of the house of Nucingen, who was already advised by himself of its speedy presentation. His passage was engaged by an agent whom he had selected at random in London, under the name of Comte Ferraro, on a vessel which was to take a rich English family from Portsmouth to Italy. Every contingency, however trifling, had been provided for. He had laid his plans so that they would look for him in Belgium and in Switzerland while he was at sea. Then, when Nucingen might believe that he was fairly on his track, he hoped to have reached Naples, where he intended to live under a false name, by favor of a disguise so complete that he had determined to change his whole face by imitating the ravages of small-pox with the aid of an acid.

Despite all those precautions, which seemed certain to assure him impunity, his conscience tormented him: he was afraid. The quiet, peaceful life he had led so long had purified his military morals. He was still upright, he did not soil his hands without regret. So he listened for the last time to the arguments of the honest nature which was struggling within him.

“Bah!” he said to himself at the corner of the boulevard and Rue Montmartre, “a cab will take me to Versailles to-night after the play. A post-chaise

awaits me there at my old quartermaster's, who would keep my secret in the face of a dozen soldiers all ready to shoot him if he refused to answer. So I can't see that there's one chance against me. I will take my little Naqui and go!"

"You will not go!" said the Englishman, whose peculiar voice sent all the cashier's blood rushing to his heart.

Melmoth entered a tilbury that was waiting for him, and was driven away so swiftly, that Castanier saw his mysterious enemy a hundred yards away, driving up Boulevard Montmartre, at a fast trot, before it even occurred to him to stop him.

"Upon my word, this is supernatural!" he said to himself. "If I were idiotic enough to believe in God, I should think he had put Saint-Michel on my heels. Would the devil and the police give me a chance to get hold of him in time? Did anyone ever see such a thing! Nonsense! this is all folly."

Castanier turned into Rue du Faubourg-Montmartre, and slackened his pace as he neared Rue Richer. On that street, in a new house, on the second floor of an ell overlooking a garden, lived a girl known in the quarter by the name of Madame de la Garde, who was the innocent cause of the crime committed by Castanier. To explain that fact and to complete the history of the crisis under which the cashier succumbed, it is necessary to relate succinctly some previous episodes in her life.

Madame de la Garde, who concealed her real name from everybody, Castanier included, claimed

to be a Piedmontese. She was one of those young women who, it may be by extreme destitution, by lack of work or by dread of death, frequently, too, by the treachery of a first lover, are driven to adopt a trade which the majority of them practise with loathing, many with indifference, and some in obedience to the laws of their nature. Just as she was on the point of hurling herself into the abyss of Parisian prostitution, at the age of sixteen, the girl in question, lovely and pure as a Madonna, fell in with Castanier. The ex-dragon, being too unpolished to succeed in society and tired of parading the boulevards every evening in search of amours to be bought, had long wished to reduce his irregular morals to something like order. Struck by the beauty of the poor child whom chance threw into his arms, he determined to rescue her from vice for his own advantage, obeying a thought no less selfish than beneficent, as are many of the thoughts of the best of men. The natural impulse is often good, society mingles its bad with it, the result being certain mixed impulses which the judge should treat with indulgence. Castanier had just enough wit to be cunning when his selfish interests were at stake. He determined to establish his philanthropy on a sure footing, so first of all he made the girl his mistress.

“Aha!” he said to himself in his military jargon, “an old wolf like me mustn’t allow himself to be *cooked* by a lamb. Before you go to housekeeping, Papa Castanier, just reconnoitre the girl’s moral

character a bit and find out if she's capable of attachment."

During the first year of that union, which, although illicit, placed her in the least reprehensible of all the positions which society censures, the Piedmontese adopted for a *nom de guerre* Aquilina, the name of one of the characters in *Venice Preserved*, an English tragedy which she had read by chance. She fancied that she resembled that courtesan, it may be in the precocious sentiments that she felt in her heart, or in her face, or in the general effect of her person. When Castanier saw that she was leading the most orderly and most virtuous life possible for a woman whose lot is cast outside of social laws and proprieties, he manifested a wish to live with her as her husband. She thereupon became Madame de la Garde, in order to enjoy the conditions attending a lawful marriage, so far as Parisian customs permit. In truth, the fixed idea of many of those poor girls consists in a longing to be received as honest bourgeoises, foolishly faithful to their husbands; capable of becoming excellent mothers of families, of keeping their accounts and mending the household linen. That longing is born of such a praiseworthy sentiment that society should take it into consideration. But society will certainly be incorrigible, and will continue to look upon the married woman as a corvette whose flag and papers entitle her to go her way, while the kept woman is the pirate who is captured for lack of the proper papers. On the day when Madame de la

Garde expressed a wish to sign her name "Madame Castanier," the cashier lost his temper.

"Then you don't love me well enough to marry me?" she said.

Castanier did not reply, but seemed absorbed in thought. The poor girl bowed to the inevitable. The ex-dragoon was in despair. Naqui was touched by his despair, she would have liked to allay it; but, in order to allay despair, one must know its cause. On the day when Naqui attempted to learn that secret,—without asking questions, by the way,—the cashier piteously divulged the existence of a certain Madame Castanier, a legitimate spouse, a thousand times accursed, who lived in obscurity at Strasburg, on a small property, and to whom he wrote twice a year, maintaining such absolute secrecy concerning her that no one knew that he was married. Why that reticence? Although the explanation is known to many military men who may have found themselves in the same plight, perhaps it will be well to give it. The genuine *troupiér*,—if we may be allowed to employ the word used in the army to denote soldiers who are destined to die captains,—that serf attached to the freehold of a regiment, is a creature essentially ingenuous, a Castanier sacrificed in advance to the trickery of mothers in garrison towns, who are burdened with daughters hard to marry. So it was, that, at Nancy, during one of those brief periods when the imperial armies tarried in France, Castanier had the misfortune to attract the attention of a young woman with

whom he had danced at one of those functions called in the provinces *redoutes*, which are frequently professed by the officers of the garrison to the town, and *vice versa*. The good-natured captain at once became the object of one of those campaigns of seduction for which mothers find confederates in the human heart, by working upon all its sensibilities, and among their friends, who conspire with them. Like people of but one idea, such mothers make everything subordinate to their great scheme, which becomes an elaborately constructed work like the shell of sand in which the ant-eater lies in wait. Perhaps no one will ever enter that carefully-constructed labyrinth, perhaps the ant-eater will die of hunger and thirst. But if any hare-brained creature does enter, he will remain. The secret calculations of avarice which every man makes when he marries, hope, human vanity, all the wires by which a captain is moved, were attacked in Castanier. To his undoing he had praised the daughter to the mother on bringing her back after a waltz; then they had a little chat, which was followed by a most natural invitation to call. Once he was enticed to the house, the dragoon was dazzled by the amiability of a family in which wealth seemed to be concealed beneath affected niggardliness. He was made the object of adroit flattery, and everyone praised the various treasures that were to be found in that house. A dinner, served on silver plate conveniently lent by an uncle, the attentions of an only daughter, the gossip of the town, a rich sub-lieutenant who pretended to be trying to

cut the grass from under his feet—in short, the thousand and one snares of provincial ant-eaters were so cunningly laid that Castanier said to himself five years later:

“I don’t know yet how it was done!”

The dragoon received a dowry of fifteen thousand francs and a young lady, luckily barren, whom two years of married life transformed into the ugliest and consequently the most ill-natured woman on earth. Her complexion, kept white by a strict diet, became pimply; her face, whose vivid coloring indicated the most seductive virtue, was covered with blotches; her figure, which seemed straight, had a twist in it; the angel was a morose, suspicious creature who drove Castanier mad; then the fortune took wings. The dragoon, no longer recognizing the woman he had married, consigned her to a small estate at Strasburg, pending the time when it should please God to embellish paradise with her. She was one of those virtuous wives who, for lack of opportunity to do anything else, drive the angels to despair with their lamentations, pray to God in a way to weary Him if He listens, and in the evening, while playing boston with their neighbors, demurely tell stories about their husbands that are worse than hanging-matter.

When Aquilina was informed of Castanier’s misfortunes, she became sincerely attached to him, and made him so happy by the enjoyments she procured for him, her woman’s genius enabling her to vary them constantly, while lavishing them upon him

without stint, that she unwittingly caused the cashier's ruin. Like many women whose destiny seems to decree that they shall go down to the very deepest depths of love, Madame de la Garde was disinterested. She asked for neither gold nor jewels, she never thought of the future, lived in the present and especially in pleasure. The rich ornaments, the dresses, the carriages, so ardently craved by women of her sort, she accepted only as one more harmonious feature in the tableau of life. She did not want them from vanity or for show, but in order to be more comfortable. And no one could do without things of that sort more easily than she. When a generous man, as almost all soldiers are, falls in with a woman of that temper, he feels a sort of rage in his heart when he finds himself unable to do his share in the mutual exchange of life. He feels that he is capable of stopping a diligence in order to obtain money, if he has not enough for his lavish expenditures. Man is made in that way. He sometimes commits a crime in order to remain a grand and noble figure in the eyes of a woman or of a special audience. A lover resembles a gambler, who would consider himself dishonored if he failed to repay what he borrows from the waiter, and who commits horrible crimes, despoils his wife and children, robs and murders, in order to arrive with full pockets and with his honor untarnished in the eyes of those who frequent the fatal place. So it was with Castanier. At first, he installed Aquilina in a modest fourth-floor apartment, and gave her only

the simplest furniture. But when he discovered the girl's manifold beauties and noble qualities, receiving at her hands pleasure undreamed of, which no words can describe, he fairly doted on her and determined to adorn his idol. Aquilina's dress contrasted so comically with her wretched lodgings, that, for both their sakes, it was necessary to make a change. That change swept away almost all of Castanier's savings, for he furnished his semi-conjugal apartment with the magnificence peculiar to the kept mistress. A pretty woman wants nothing ugly about her. The one thing that distinguishes her from all other women is the sentiment of homogeneousness, one of the least noticed needs of our nature, which leads old maids to surround themselves with none but old things. For that reason, therefore, the fair Piedmontese must have the newest, the most stylish objects, the daintiest wares that the shops afforded, fine hangings, silks and jewels, light and fragile furniture, lovely porcelains. She asked for nothing. But, when she was called upon to choose, when Castanier said to her: "Which do you like?" she would say: "Why, that is the nicest!" The love that economizes is never true love, so Castanier took the best that there was. When the scale of proportion was once admitted, everything in the household must necessarily be in harmony. There were the linen, the silverware, and the thousand and one accessories of a well-ordered establishment, the kitchen outfit, the glass, the devil! Although Castanier intended, to use a

familiar expression, to do things simply, his debts steadily increased. One thing necessitated another. A clock required two candelabra. The carved mantelpiece demanded a fireplace. The draperies and hangings were too fresh and new to allow them to be blackened by the smoke, so they must have some of the fashionable chimneys, recently invented by gentlemen skilful in the art of composing prospectuses, which claimed to provide an invincible guaranty against smoke. And then Aquilina found it so pleasant to run about barefooted on her chamber carpet, that Castanier spread carpets everywhere to frolic with Naqui; and, lastly, he built her a bath-room, always for her greater comfort. The shopkeepers, the workmen, the manufacturers of Paris have a most extraordinary talent for increasing the size of the hole a man makes in his purse; when you consult them, they never know the price of anything, and the frenzy of desire never brooks delay; thus they procure orders in the shadow of an approximate estimate, then they delay sending in their bills, and lead the customer on into the vortex of house-furnishing. Everything is delightful, fascinating, and everyone is satisfied. A few months later, these obliging merchants reappear, metamorphosed into statements of account of distressing urgency; they have a pressing need of money, payments to be made at once, they even claim to be on the verge of bankruptcy, they weep and they move you to pity! Thereupon the crater opens, vomiting forth a column of figures marching by fours, when

they should march innocently three by three. Before Castanier knew the amount of his expenditures, he had adopted the habit of providing his mistress with a coupé whenever she went out, instead of allowing her to ride in a cab. Castanier was a gourmand, he had an excellent cook; and Aquilina, to give him pleasure, regaled him with early vegetables, gastronomic rarities, and choice wines which she purchased herself. But, as she had nothing of her own, her gifts, although they were of priceless value to him because of the thoughtful affection and charming delicacy that dictated them, were a constant drain upon Castanier's purse, for he did not choose that his Naqui should be without money, and she always was without money! Thus the table was a source of large expenditure, relatively to the cashier's income. The ex-dragon was obliged to resort to commercial artifices to procure money, for it was impossible for him to renounce his pleasures. His love for the woman precluded him from opposing the whims of the mistress. He was one of those men who, whether from self-love or from weakness, can refuse a woman nothing, and who have such a powerful feeling of false shame at the thought of saying: "I cannot—my means will not allow me—I have no money," that they ruin themselves. So that, when the day came that Castanier found himself on the brink of a precipice, and realized that, in order to save himself, he must leave Aquilina and betake himself to a bread-and-water diet, to the end that he might pay his debts, he had become so

accustomed to that woman and that life, that he postponed his plans of reform every morning. First of all, under the stress of circumstances, he borrowed. His position and his antecedents had won for him a reputation for trustworthiness of which he took advantage to lay out a system of borrowing in proportion to his needs: Then, to disguise the amount to which his debts rapidly climbed, he had recourse to what are known in the business world as *circulations*. These are notes which represent no actual consideration in merchandise or money, and which the first endorser pays for the obliging maker—a species of forgery, tolerated because it is impossible to prove, and because, furthermore, this ingenious fraud becomes real only in case of non-payment. Finally, when Castanier saw that it was impossible for him to continue his financial manœuvres, both because of the rapid increase of the capital and of the enormous interest he had to pay, he was obliged to face the thought of insolvency. With disgrace staring him in the face, Castanier preferred fraudulent insolvency to simple insolvency, crime to misdemeanor. He determined to discount the confidence which he owed to his previous probity, and to increase the number of his creditors by borrowing, after the fashion of the famous cashier of the royal Treasury, a sufficient sum to enable him to live happily in a foreign country for the balance of his days. And he had taken measures to that end, as we have seen. Aquilina knew nothing of the wearisomeness of that life, she simply

enjoyed it as many women do, without asking where the money came from, any more than certain people ask how the wheat grows when they eat their fine white bread; whereas the painstaking care and the disappointments of the farmer stand behind the baker's oven, just as crushing anxiety and the most exacting toil lurk unseen beneath the exterior splendor of most Parisian households.

At the moment that Castanier was undergoing the tortures of uncertainty, meditating a step that would change his whole life, Aquilina, buried in a capacious armchair in front of the fire, was calmly awaiting him, in the company of her maid. Like all maids in the service of ladies of that sort, Jenny had become her confidante, after she had discovered how unassailable was the empire her mistress had obtained over Castanier.

"What are we going to do to-night? Léon absolutely insists upon coming," said Madame de la Garde, running her eyes over a passionate letter written upon paper of a grayish tinge.

"Here's monsieur!" said Jenny.

Castanier entered. Aquilina, with perfect unconcern, crumpled the letter, took it in her tongs and burned it.

"So that's what you do with your love-letters?" said Castanier.

"Why, yes, of course," replied Aquilina; "isn't that the best way to make sure they're not found? And then, should not fire go to fire, as water goes to the river?"

"You say that, Naqui, as if it were a real love-letter."

"Well, am I not lovely enough to receive them?" she said, offering Castanier her forehead with a sort of negligent air that would have told a man less blinded than he that she was performing a conjugal duty, so to speak, in giving him pleasure; but Castanier had reached that degree of passion, due to habit, that made it impossible for him to notice anything.

"I have a box for the Gymnase this evening," he said; "let us dine early so as not to dine post-haste."

"Go with Jenny. I am tired of the theatre. I don't know what's the matter with me to-night, but I prefer to sit by the fire."

"Come all the same, Naqui; I haven't long to bore you with my attentions. Yes, Quiqui, I am going away to-night and shall not return for some time. I leave you mistress of everything here. Will you keep your heart for me?"

"Neither my heart nor anything else. But, when you come back, Naqui will still be Naqui to you."

"That's frank, upon my word. So you won't go with me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Why, can I leave the lover who writes me such sweet notes as that?" she said, with a smile, pointing with a half-mocking gesture to the charred paper.

"Can it be true?" queried Castanier. "Have you a lover?"

"What!" rejoined Aquilina, "have you never considered yourself seriously, my dear? In the first place, you're fifty years old! Then you have a face to put on a fruit-woman's stand, for no one would ever contradict her when she tried to sell it for a pumpkin. When you come upstairs, you puff like a porpoise. Your paunch quivers like a diamond on a woman's head!—No matter if you did serve in the dragoons, you're a very ugly old fellow! Gad! I don't advise you, if you want to retain my esteem, to add to the qualities I have mentioned the absurd folly of thinking that such a girl as I am can get along without tempering your asthmatic love with the flowers of some pretty youth—"

"Of course you are joking, Aquilina?"

"Well, aren't you joking, too? Do you take me for a fool that you talk about going away? 'I am going away this evening,' " she said, mimicking him. "You great drone, would you talk like that if you were going to leave your Naqui? You would cry like the calf that you are!"

"But, if I do go, will you go with me?" he asked.

"Tell me first if this talk about a journey isn't a poor joke?"

"No; seriously, I am going away."

"Very well, then, seriously, I will stay here. A pleasant journey, my boy! I'll wait for you. I would rather leave life than leave my dear little Paris."

"You won't come to Italy, to Naples, to lead a pleasant, lazy, luxurious life, with your old man who puffs like a porpoise?"

"No."

"Ingrate!"

"Ingrate?" she said, rising. "I can leave this house instantly, carrying nothing but my person. I have given you all the treasures a young girl possesses, and something that all your blood and mine cannot give back to me. If I could, by any means whatever, by selling my immortality, for instance, recover the purity of my body as I have, perhaps, recovered that of my soul, and could give myself to my lover as pure as a lily, I would not hesitate one second! With what devotion have you rewarded mine? You have fed and housed me from the same feeling that leads one to feed a dog and give him a kennel to sleep in, because he keeps good watch over us, because he receives our kicks when we are in a bad humor, and licks our hand as soon as we call him back. Which of us two has been the more generous?"

"Oh! my dear child, don't you see that I am joking," rejoined Castanier. "I am going on a little trip that won't last long. But you must come to the Gymnase with me; I shall start about midnight, after saying adieu to you."

"My poor boy, so you are really going away?" she said, taking him by the neck and drawing his head down upon her bosom.

"You're suffocating me!" cried Castanier, with his nose against Aquilina's breast.

The honest girl put her lips to Jenny's ear:

"Go and tell Léon not to come until one o'clock. If you don't find him and he arrives during our farewell, keep him in your room.—Well," she said aloud, holding Castanier's face in front of her own and pulling his nose, "well, then, O loveliest of porpoises, I will go to the theatre with you to-night. But, in that case, let us have dinner! You have a nice little dinner, everything that you like."

"It's very hard to leave a woman like you!" said Castanier.

"Why do you go, then?" she asked.

"Ah! why? why? To explain it to you, I must tell you things that would prove to you that my love goes to the point of madness. If you have given me your honor, I have sold mine, so we are quits. Is that love?"

"What does that amount to?" she replied.

"Come, tell me that, if I had a lover, you would continue to love me like a father; that would be love! Come, tell me at once and give me your hand on it."

"I would kill you," said Castanier, with a smile.

They adjourned to the dining-room, and went to the Gymnase after they had dined. When the first play was at an end, Castanier determined to speak to certain acquaintances whom he had noticed in the audience, in order to avert as long as possible any suspicion that he had absconded. He left Madame de la Garde in her box, which, in accordance with her modest habits, was one of the best in the house,

and went out to saunter in the foyer. He had taken but a few steps, when he recognized the features of Melmoth, whose glance caused him the same inward burning sensation, the same terror that he had felt before; in a moment they stood face to face.

“Forger!” cried the Englishman.

When he heard that word, Castanier glanced at the people who were walking near them. He fancied that he detected an expression of amazement mingled with curiosity upon their faces, and determined to rid himself of the Englishman on the spot; he raised his hand to strike him, but he felt that his arm was paralyzed by an irresistible power, which took possession of his strength and nailed him to the spot; he allowed the stranger to take his arm, and they walked together up and down the foyer like two friends.

“Who is strong enough to resist me?” said the Englishman. “Do you not know that everybody on earth is bound to obey me, that I can do anything? I read men’s hearts, I see the future, I know the past. I am here, and I may be elsewhere! I depend neither on time nor space nor distance. The world is my servant. I have the faculty of being always happy and of always imparting happiness. My eye sees through walls, discovers treasures, and I draw freely upon them. At a nod of my head, palaces spring up, and my architect is never at fault. I can make flowers bloom in any soil, pile up gold and precious stones, procure women who are never the same; in a word, everything yields to me.

I could trade on the Bourse with perfect safety, if the man who knows how to find gold where misers bury it needed to draw upon other men's purses. Feel, therefore, O miserable wretch doomed to everlasting shame, feel the power of the claw that holds you! Try to bend this arm of iron! soften this heart of adamant! dare to stir from my side! If you should be in the depths of the caverns under the Seine, would you not hear my voice? If you should enter the Catacombs, would you not see me? My voice drowns the roar of the thunder, my eyes rival the sun in brilliancy, for I am the equal of *Him who bears the light.*"

Castanier listened to those terrible words, nothing in his feelings tended to contradict them, and he walked by the Englishman's side, unable to leave him.

"You belong to me, you have committed a crime. So I have found at last the companion I sought. Do you know your destiny? Ha! ha! you expected to see a play, you shall not be disappointed, you shall see two. Come, present me to Madame de la Garde as one of your best friends. Am I not your last hope?"

Castanier returned to his box, accompanied by the stranger, whom he made haste to present to Madame de la Garde according to the orders he had received. Aquilina did not seem surprised to see Melmoth. The Englishman declined to sit at the front of the box, but insisted that Castanier should sit beside his mistress. The Englishman's slightest wish was a

command that must be obeyed. The play about to be performed was the last. At that time, the smaller theatres gave only three plays. The Gymnase had an actor just then who assured its popularity. Perlet was to play the *Comédien d'Etampes*, a vaudeville in which he played four different parts. When the curtain rose, the stranger stretched his hand out over the audience. Castanier uttered a cry of alarm, but it stuck in his windpipe, which contracted violently, for Melmoth pointed to the stage, thus giving him to understand that he had ordered the play to be changed. The cashier beheld Nucingen's private office; his employer was there in consultation with one of the higher officials from the prefecture of police, who was describing Castanier's *modus operandi*, and advising him of the robbery of his safe, the forgery committed to his detriment, and the flight of his cashier. A complaint was at once drawn up, signed, and despatched to the king's attorney.

"Do you think we shall be in time?" asked Nucingen.

"Yes," replied the officer; "he's at the Gymnase, and suspects nothing."

Castanier fidgeted on his chair and attempted to leave the box; but the hand Melmoth laid upon his shoulder compelled him to remain, by the same ghastly power whose effects we feel in a nightmare. That man was nightmare personified, and weighed upon Castanier like an atmosphere heavy with poison. When the poor cashier turned to the Englishman to implore mercy, he encountered a glance of

fire which shot forth electric currents, sharp points of metal, as it were, which seemed to enter Castanier's body, transfix him, and nail him to his chair.

"What have I done to you?" he said, in his distress, panting like a deer on the brink of a stream; "what do you want of me?"

"Look!" cried Melmoth.

Castanier looked at what was taking place on the stage. The scene had been changed, the play was done; Castanier saw himself on the stage, alighting from his carriage with Aquilina; but, just as they were entering the courtyard of his house on Rue Richer, the scene suddenly changed again and he saw the interior of his apartment. Jenny was sitting by the fire, in her mistress's bedroom, talking with a subaltern of a regiment of the line then in garrison in Paris.

"He is going away," said the sergeant, who seemed to belong to a well-to-do family, "so I shall be happy at my ease! I love Aquilina too dearly to endure the thought of her belonging to that old toad! For my part, I will marry Madame de la Garde!" cried the sergeant.

"Here are monsieur and madame, hide! Quick! quick! go in here, Monsieur Léon!" said Jenny. "Monsieur isn't likely to stay long."

Castanier saw the subaltern crawl behind Aquilina's dresses in her dressing-room. Soon he himself came on once more and went through the parting scene with his mistress, who made fun of him in her asides to Jenny, talking to him all the while in the

sweetest, most affectionate tone. She wept with one side of her face, smiled with the other. The audience demanded a repetition of the scene.

"Accursed woman!" cried Castanier from his box.

Aquilina laughed till the tears rolled down her cheeks, crying:

"*Mon Dieu!* what a comical Englishwoman Perlet makes!—Why, you're the only one in the whole audience who isn't laughing, old boy! Laugh, I tell you!" she said to the cashier.

Melmoth began to laugh in a way that made the cashier shudder. The English chuckle wrung his entrails and agitated his brain as if a surgeon had trepanned him with a hot iron.

"They laugh! they laugh!" said Castanier, hysterically.

At that moment, instead of seeing the mock-modest *lady* whom Perlet represented so comically, and whose Anglo-French dialect kept the whole audience in a roar of laughter, the cashier saw himself hurrying along Rue Richer, entering a cab on the boulevard, making a bargain with the driver to take him to Versailles. Again the scene changed. He recognized the little one-eyed inn kept by his former quartermaster, at the corner of Rue de l'Orangerie and Rue des Récollets. It was two o'clock in the morning, the most profound silence reigned, no one was watching his movements, post-horses were harnessed to his carriage, and it was on its way from a house on Avenue de Paris, the residence of an Englishman in whose name it had been ordered, in order

to avert suspicion. Castanier had his money and his passports, he entered the carriage and started. But at the barrier he saw divers gendarmes on foot waiting for the carriage. He uttered a terrible cry which a glance from Melmoth silenced.

"Look, and hold your peace!" said the Englishman.

In a moment, Castanier saw himself cast into prison at the Conciergerie. Then, in the fifth act of that drama entitled *The Cashier*, he saw himself, three months later, leaving the Assize Court, sentenced to twenty years' penal servitude. He cried aloud once more when he saw himself on exhibition on Place du Palais-de-Justice and branded by the executioner's red-hot iron. Finally, in the last scene, he was in the courtyard at Bicêtre, with sixty other convicts, awaiting his turn to have the fetters riveted on his leg.

"*Mon Dieu!* I cannot laugh any more!" said Aquilina. "You are very dismal, my boy! what in Heaven's name's the matter with you? That gentleman isn't here now."

"Just a word, Castanier," said Melmoth, when the performance was at an end and the box-opener was putting on Madame de la Garde's cloak.

The corridor was crowded, flight was impossible.

"Well, what is it?"

"No human power can prevent you from escorting Aquilina home, going to Versailles, and being arrested."

“Why?”

“Because the arm that holds you will not let you go,” said the Englishman.

Castanier would have liked to be able to say a word, to annihilate himself, and disappear in the depths of hell.

“If the devil should ask you for your soul, wouldn’t you give it to him in exchange for a power equal to the power of God? At a single word, you could restore to Baron de Nucingen’s strong-box the five hundred thousand francs you took from it. Then, by tearing up your letter of credit, you could wipe out every trace of crime. Lastly, you would have gold in oceans. You hardly believe any of this, do you? Very good; if it all comes to pass, you will at least believe in the devil.”

“If it were possible!” said Castanier, joyfully.

“He who can do *this*,” replied the Englishman, “assures you that it is.”

Melmoth put out his arm as he and Castanier and Madame de la Garde were walking along the boulevard. A fine rain was falling, the ground was muddy, the atmosphere heavy, and the sky black. The instant that man’s arm was extended, the sun shone upon Paris. To Castanier it seemed to be a beautiful July afternoon. The trees were covered with leaves, and the good Parisians, in their Sunday clothes, strolled along in two joyous lines. The liquorice-water vendors were crying: “Fresh-made beverage!” Gorgeous equipages rolled by. The cashier uttered a cry of terror. At that cry, the boulevard

became damp and dark as before. Madame de la Garde had entered the carriage.

"Come, come, hurry, my dear!" she said, "either get in or stay out. Upon my word, you're as trying to-night as this rain."

"What must I do?" Castanier asked Melmoth.

"Do you wish to take my place?"

"Yes."

"Very well, I will be at your apartments in a few moments."

"Look you, Castanier, you're not in your ordinary frame of mind," said Aquilina. "You're contemplating something out of the way, you were too glum and too thoughtful during the performance. My dear boy, are you in need of anything that I can give you? tell me."

"I am waiting until we get home to find out whether you love me."

"It isn't worth while to wait," she said, throwing her arms about his neck, "see this."

She kissed him passionately, to all appearance, and showered upon him the cajoleries that, in creatures of that class, become part of the stock in trade, just as stage tricks are to an actress.

"Where does this music come from?" said Castanier.

"Well, well, so you hear music now, do you?"

"Heavenly music!" he replied. "I should say that the strains come from on high."

"What! you have always refused to give me a box at the *Italiens*, on the pretext that you couldn't

IN AQUILINA'S DRESSING-ROOM

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endure music, and now you're music-mad! Why, you're crazy! your music's in your noddle, old dunderpate," she said, taking his head and rocking it against her shoulder. "Say, papa, are the carriage-wheels singing?"

"Just listen, Naqui! If the angels sing for the good Lord, it must be such singing as this; the strains enter my body through every pore as well as through my ears, and I know not how to describe it to you, for it is as sweet as distilled honey!"

"Why, of course, the angels do entertain the good Lord with music, for they are always represented with harps. On my word of honor, he's mad!" she said, as Castanier assumed the attitude of an opium-eater in a trance.

They had reached the house. Castanier, engrossed by all that he had seen and heard, not knowing whether he should believe or doubt, staggered like a drunken man, bereft of reason. He recovered consciousness in Aquilina's room, whither he had been carried by his mistress, the concierge, and Jenny, for he had fainted on alighting from the carriage.

"My friends, my friends, *he* is coming!" he exclaimed, burying himself in his easy-chair by the fire, with a gesture of despair.

At that moment, Jenny heard the bell, went to the door, and announced the Englishman as a gentleman who said that he had an appointment with Castanier. Melmoth suddenly appeared. There was a profound silence. He looked at the concierge, the concierge

left the room. He looked at Jenny, Jenny left the room.

“Madame,” he said to the courtesan, “permit me to conclude a little matter that admits of no delay.”

He took Castanier’s hand, and Castanier arose. They went together into the unlighted salon, for Melmoth’s eye illumined the most dense darkness. Fascinated by the strange expression of the unknown, Aquilina remained helpless in her bedroom, incapable of thinking of her lover, whom she believed to be safely hidden in her maid’s room, whereas Jenny, surprised by Castanier’s early return, had hidden him in the dressing-room, as in the drama witnessed by Melmoth and his victim. The door of the apartment was closed with violence, and Castanier soon reappeared.

“What is the matter with you?” cried his mistress, horror-struck.

The cashier’s face was transformed. His ruddy complexion had given place to the strange pallor that made the stranger awe-inspiring and cold. His eyes gave forth a threatening flame that wounded one by its insufferable brilliancy. His affable manner had become despotic and proud. To the courtesan he seemed to have grown thin, his brow was awful in its majesty, and he exhaled a terrifying current that weighed upon others like a heavy atmosphere. Aquilina for a moment had a feeling of awe.

“What can have happened between that diabolical man and you in so short a time?” she asked.

"I have sold my soul. I can feel that I am no longer the same. He has taken my being and given me his."

"What?"

"You could not understand.—Ah!" added Castanier, coldly, "that devil was right! I see everything and know everything. You have deceived me!"

Those words froze Aquilina's blood. Castanier went into the dressing-room after lighting the candle. The poor girl, dazed with fear, followed him, and great was her astonishment when Castanier, having put aside the dresses hanging against the wall, revealed the subaltern.

"Come, my dear fellow," he said, taking Léon by the button of his coat and leading him into the bedroom.

The Piedmontese, pale and desperate, had thrown herself into her armchair. Castanier sat on the couch by the hearth, leaving Aquilina's lover standing.

"You are an old soldier," said Léon, "I am ready to give you satisfaction."

"You're a fool," retorted Castanier, dryly. "I don't need to fight, I can kill whomever I please, with a glance. I am going to tell you your story, my boy. Why should I kill you? You have on your neck a red line that I can see. The guillotine awaits you. Yes, you will die on Place de Grève. You belong to the executioner, nothing can save you. You are one of a section of the Carbonari. You're conspiring against the government."

"You never told me that!" cried the Piedmontese to Léon.

"So you don't know," continued the cashier, "that the ministry decided this morning to prosecute your society? The procureur-général has taken your names. You are denounced by traitors. At this moment, they're at work preparing the charge against you."

"Then it was you who betrayed him?" said Aquilina, and she rose and rushed at Castanier with a roar like that of a wounded lioness.

"You know me too well to believe it," he replied, with an imperturbable manner that turned her to stone.

"How do you know it, then?"

"I didn't know it until I went into the salon; but now I see everything, I know everything, I can do everything."

The subaltern was stupefied.

"Then save him, my friend!" cried the girl, throwing herself at Castanier's feet. "Save him, if you can do everything! I will love you, I will worship you, I will be your slave instead of your mistress! I will bow to your most extravagant caprices, you shall do with me what you will! Yes, I will find something more than love for you; I will be as devoted as a daughter to her father, in addition to— But you understand, Rodolphe! However violent my passions may be, I will always be yours! What is there that I can say to you to move you? I will invent new pleasures—I—God help me! if you want

me to do anything under heaven, to throw myself out of the window, you have only to say: 'Léon!' and I will jump into hell, welcome every variety of suffering, disease, and sorrow, whatever you choose to inflict on me!"

Castanier was unmoved. His only reply was to point to Léon, and say, with a demoniacal laugh:

"The guillotine awaits him."

"No, he shall not leave this room, I will save him!" she cried. "Yes, I will kill the man that touches him! Why won't you consent to save him?" she shrieked in a piercing voice, her eyes aflame, her hair dishevelled. "Can you?"

"I can do anything."

"Why won't you save him?"

"Why?" cried Castanier in a voice that shook the rafters. "Ah! I am having my revenge! It is my trade to do harm."

"Die!" rejoined Aquilina, "he, my lover, die! is it possible?"

She rushed to her commode, snatched a stiletto from a work-basket, and leaped at Castanier, who began to laugh.

"You know very well that steel cannot touch me now."

Aquilina's arm relaxed like a harp-string suddenly cut.

"Go, my dear fellow," said the cashier, turning to the subaltern; "go about your business."

He put out his hand, and the soldier was obliged to obey the superior force Castanier exerted.

“I am in my own house, I might send to the commissioner of police and hand over to him a man who comes into my house by stealth, but I prefer to restore your liberty: I am a devil, not a spy.”

“I will go with him!” said Aquilina.

“Go with him,” Castanier retorted.—“Jenny!”

Jenny answered his summons.

“Send the concierge to call a cab for them.—Here, Naqui,” he added, taking a package of banknotes from his pocket, “you shall not leave a man who still loves you, like a poor abandoned creature.”

He handed her three hundred thousand francs; Aquilina took them, threw them on the floor, spit on them; stamped on them in a frenzy of despair.

“We will both go out on foot,” she exclaimed, “without a sou from you!—Stay, Jenny.”

“Good-night,” retorted the cashier, picking up his money. “I have just returned from a journey.—Jenny,” he said, looking at the wondering lady’s maid, “you seem to me a good girl. You’re without a mistress; come here! For to-night you shall have a master.”

Aquilina, distrustful of everyone, went at once with the subaltern to the house of one of her friends. But Léon was under suspicion by the police, who caused him to be followed wherever he went. He was arrested a few days later, with his three friends, as the newspapers of the day record.

The cashier was conscious of a complete change, moral as well as physical. The former Castanier, child, youth, lover, soldier, brave, deceived, married,

undeceived, cashier, passionate, a criminal through love, no longer existed. His interior form had burst. In a twinkling his brain had expanded, his senses had broadened. His mind embraced the whole world, he saw things as if he were placed at a tremendous height. Before going to the play, he had a most insane passion for Aquilina; rather than give her up he would have shut his eyes to her infidelity; that blind sentiment had faded away as a cloud vanishes before the sun's rays.

Overjoyed to step into her mistress's shoes and possess her fortune, Jenny did whatever the cashier wished. But Castanier, having the power to read the mind, discovered the real motive of that purely physical devotion. So he amused himself with that girl with the malicious greediness of a child who, after squeezing the juice from a cherry, throws away the stone. The next morning, at breakfast, when she fancied herself duly installed as mistress of the house, Castanier, as he drank his coffee, repeated to her word for word, thought for thought, what she was saying to herself.

"Do you know what you're thinking, my girl?" he said, with a smile; "this is it: 'This lovely violet-wood furniture that I wanted so badly, and these beautiful dresses that I've been trying on, are mine! They have cost me only a few trifles that madame refused him, I don't know why! Faith, for the sake of riding in a carriage, having fine clothes, having a box at the theatre, and obtaining a nice little income, I'd give him enjoyment enough to kill him, if he

weren't as lusty as a Turk. I never saw such a man!"—Is that about it?" he continued, in a voice that made Jenny turn pale. "Well, my girl, you wouldn't hold to your bargain, and it's for your own good that I send you away; you would die at the task. Come, let us part good friends."

He dismissed her coldly, giving her a small sum.

The first use Castanier had promised himself to make of the terrible power he had purchased at the price of his everlasting salvation was to satisfy his inclinations fully and absolutely. After putting his affairs in order, and settling his accounts satisfactorily with Monsieur de Nucingen, who hired an honest German to succeed him, he determined to have a debauch worthy of the Roman Empire at its best, and plunged into it as desperately as Belshazzar attacked his last feast. But, like Belshazzar, he distinctly saw a hand gleaming with light writing his doom in the midst of his carousing, not on the narrow walls of a room, but on the boundless walls upon which the rainbow appears. His feast was not, in truth, a revel confined to the limits of a banquet, it was a reckless squandering of every element of strength and enjoyment. The earth itself was, in a manner, the festive board that he felt quivering beneath his feet. It was the last revel of a debauchee who spares nothing. Drawing without stint upon the treasure of human lust, the key of which had been handed him by the demon, he soon reached the bottom. That enormous power, grasped in a moment, was put to the test, found reliable, and

abused. That which was everything was nothing. It often happens that possession ruins the most ecstatic poems of desire, for the object possessed rarely answers to desire's dreams. That pitiful ending of a few passions was the secret concealed beneath Melmoth's omnipotence. The emptiness of human nature was abruptly revealed to his successor, to whom supreme power brought nothingness by way of dowry. In order to understand clearly the peculiar situation in which Castanier was placed, one must be able to form an idea of its swift transformations, and to conceive how brief was their duration, a thing which it is difficult to explain to those who are imprisoned by the laws of time, space, and distance. His broadened faculties had changed the relations that formerly existed between the world and himself. Like Melmoth, Castanier could in a few seconds alight in the smiling valleys of Hindostan, fly upon demons' wings across the African deserts, and skim along the surface of the sea. Just as his keenness of vision enabled him to go to the root of everything the instant that his faculties were directed upon any material object, or into another person's mind, so his tongue tasted, so to speak, all the delicious flavors at one touch. His pleasure resembled the blows of the axe of despotism, which fells the tree in order to obtain the fruit. The transitions, the alternations which furnish a measure of joy and suffering, and give variety to all human pleasures, had no existence for him. His palate, sensitive beyond all measure, had suddenly been

spoiled through being surfeited with everything. Women and good cheer were two varieties of pleasure which palled upon him so completely as soon as he was able to enjoy them in such way as to out-pleasure pleasure, that he ceased to have the slightest desire to eat or to love. Knowing that he was the master of all the women he might desire, and knowing that he was possessed of a power which would never fail him, he wanted no more of women; finding them prepared in advance to submit to his most outrageous caprices, he felt a horrible thirst for love, and wished them to be more loving than it was in their power to be. But the only things the world denied him were faith and prayer, those two healing and consoling loves. Everyone obeyed him. It was a ghastly state of affairs. The torrents of sorrows, of pleasures, of thoughts, that shook his body and his soul would have been too much for the strongest human being; but there was in him a power of living proportioned to the violence of the sensations that assailed him. He felt within him an enormous something which the earth no longer satisfied. He passed the day spreading his wings, seeking to traverse the spheres of light of which he had a distinct and distressing intuition. He was drying up internally, for he was hungry and thirsty for things which could not be eaten or drunk, but which attracted him irresistibly. His lips glowed with desire, like Melmoth's own, and he panted for the UNKNOWN, for he knew everything. Being permitted to see the active principle and the mechanism

of the world, he ceased to admire their results, and soon manifested that profound contempt which makes the man of superior mould like a sphinx who knows everything, sees everything, and remains silent and unmoved. He did not feel the slightest inclination to communicate his knowledge to other men. Rich in the possession of the whole earth, and endowed with the power to encircle it at one bound, wealth and power no longer had any meaning for him. He experienced that ghastly depression attaching to supreme power which only God and Satan can overcome by an activity of which they alone possess the secret.

Castanier had not, like his master, an inexhaustible power of hatred and evil-doing; he felt that he was a demon, but a demon *in futuro*, whereas Satan is a demon for all eternity; nothing can redeem him, and he knows it, so he takes pleasure in stirring up the world with his three-pronged fork, as if it were a dungheap, and interfering with God's projects. Unluckily for Castanier, he retained a shadow of hope. He could go abruptly, in an instant, from pole to pole, as a bird flies desperately from side to side of its cage; but when he had taken that flight, like the bird, he saw boundless space. He had a vision of the infinite which made it impossible for him to regard human affairs as other men regard them. The madmen who desire the power of the devil judge that power from their standpoint as human beings, not foreseeing that they must shoulder the devil's ideas when they assume his power,

while they continue to be men and to remain among other men who can no longer understand them. The unpublished Nero who dreams of burning Paris for his diversion, just as a supposititious conflagration is represented on the stage, does not suspect that Paris will become to him what an ant-hill by the roadside is to the hurried traveller. The sciences were to Castanier what an enigma is to him who knows the answer. Kings and governments aroused his pity. His grand debauch, therefore, was, in a certain sense, a deplorable farewell to his human state. He felt stifled on earth, for his infernal power enabled him to watch the processes of creation, whose moving causes and final result he knew. Knowing that he was excluded from what men call heaven in every language, he could think of nothing but heaven. He understood the inward shrivelling depicted on his predecessor's face, he measured the significance of that glance inflamed by a hope never fulfilled, he experienced the thirst that parched that red lip, and the distress of a constant combat between two expanded natures. He might yet be an angel, he *was* a devil. He resembled the sweet creature who was imprisoned by the ill-will of a sorcerer in a deformed body, and, being bound by the terms of her compact, required the assistance of another person's will to destroy the hated envelope. Just as the truly great man is the more eager in his search for infinity of sentiment in a woman's heart, after being deceived, so Castanier suddenly found himself beset by a single idea, the idea which was, perhaps, the key to

the worlds above. By virtue of the very fact that he had renounced his hope of everlasting happiness, he could think of nothing but the future of those who pray and believe. When, upon the conclusion of the debauch during which he took possession of his power, he felt the clutch of that sentiment, he experienced the agony that the sanctified poets, the apostles, and the great oracles of the faith have described in such grandiose terms. Spurred on by the flaming sword whose sharp point he felt in his loins, he ran to Melmoth's house to see what had become of his predecessor. The Englishman lived on Rue Férou, near Saint-Sulpice, in a gloomy, dark, damp, cold house. That street, which runs north and south like all those which strike the left bank of the Seine at right angles, is one of the most dismal in Paris, and its characteristics are reflected in the houses that line it. When Castanier stood in the doorway, he saw that it was draped with black, as was the vestibule. The vestibule gleamed with the lights of a mortuary apartment. A temporary cenotaph had been erected there, and a priest stood on each side.

"I need not ask you why you have come, monsieur," said an old portress to Castanier: "you look too much like the poor dear deceased. If you're his brother, you have come too late to bid him good-bye. The excellent man died the night before last."

"How did he die?" Castanier asked one of the priests.

"Be happy," an old priest answered, raising one side of the black cloths that surrounded the cenotaph.

Castanier saw one of those faces which faith makes sublime, and through whose pores the soul seems to go forth to shine upon other men and excite them by persistently instilling sentiments of charity. The priest was Sir John Melmoth's confessor.

"Monsieur, your brother," he said, "made an end worthy of emulation, which must have rejoiced the hearts of the angels. Do you know what joy is aroused in heaven by the conversion of one single soul? The tears of repentance, called forth by divine grace, flowed unceasingly; death alone could dry them. The Holy Spirit was in him. His ardent, earnest words were worthy of the prophet-king. While it is true that I have never, in the course of my life, heard a more horrifying confession than that of this Irish gentleman, it is equally true that I have never heard more fervent prayers than his. Great as his sins may have been, his repentance filled the abyss in an instant. God's hand was visibly extended over him, for he did not resemble himself; he had become so beautiful, with a saintlike beauty. His eyes, once so hard, were softened by his tears; his voice, once so resonant and terrifying, acquired the softness and charm which distinguish the voices of men who have humbled themselves. He so edified those who listened to his words, that the persons drawn hither by the spectacle of that Christian death fell upon their knees as they heard him glorify God, tell of His infinite grandeur, and discourse of heavenly things. Although he leaves

his family nothing, he has surely bestowed upon it the most precious treasure that families can possess, a sanctified soul that will watch over you all and lead you in the straight path.”

These words produced such a powerful effect upon Castanier, that he left the house abruptly and walked toward Saint-Sulpice, obeying a sort of fatality; Melmoth’s repentance had bewildered him. About that time, a man, famous for his eloquence, was holding conferences on certain days, in the morning, his aim being to demonstrate the verities of the Catholic Church to the youth of the period, who had been declared, by another no less eloquent voice, to be indifferent in the matter of faith. The conference on that day was to be followed by the Irishman’s funeral. Castanier arrived at the precise moment when the preacher was about to sum up the proofs of our happy future, with the unctuous charm, with the penetrating eloquence, which made him illustrious. The ex-dragon, into whose skin the devil had crept, was in the most favorable condition to receive with fruitful results the seed of the divine words as interpreted by the priest. In truth, if there is one indubitable phenomenon, is it not the moral phenomenon which the common people have called *the charcoal-burner’s faith*?* The power of faith is in direct ratio to the greater or less use a man has made of his reasoning powers. Men of simple lives, and soldiers, are of this number. They who have marched

* *La foi du charbonnier*,—a phrase used to express a faith that is absolute and unquestioning.

under the banner of instinct are much better fitted to receive the light than they whose minds and hearts have become fatigued in the subtleties of the world. From the age of sixteen until he was nearly forty, Castanier, a man of the South, had followed the French flag. A simple cavalryman, obliged to fight yesterday and to-day and to-morrow, he naturally thought of his horse before thinking of himself. During his military apprenticeship, therefore, he had few hours to think of the future of mankind. As an officer, he had given his thoughts to his soldiers, and he had gone from battle-field to battle-field without once thinking of the day after death. Military life calls for few ideas. Men who are incapable of rising to the height of those lofty combinations which embrace the rights and duties of nations with respect to one another, political plans as well as plans of campaign, the science of the tactician and that of the administrator—such men live in a state of ignorance comparable to that of the stupidest peasant in the least progressive province of France. They go forward, passively obeying the mind that commands them, and kill the men in front of them as the wood-cutter fells trees in a forest. They pass and repass constantly from a state of violent excitement which calls for the exertion of all their physical strength, to a state of repose during which they repair their losses. They strike and drink, they strike and eat, they strike and sleep, in order that they may strike more effectively. In that life of turmoil their mental qualities are exercised but little.

The mental equipment retains its primitive simplicity. When these men, who exhibit such energy on the field of battle, return to civilization, the greater part of those who have remained in the lower grades are without acquired ideas, without faculties, without breadth. So that the younger generation is amazed to find those members of our glorious and terrible armies as devoid of intelligence as any clerk, and as simple-minded as children. It would be hard to find a captain in the death-dealing Garde Impériale who is fitted to sign receipts for subscriptions to a newspaper. When old soldiers are in this condition, their minds, innocent of reasoning power, obey any powerful impulsion. The crime committed by Castanier was one of those facts which raise so many questions, that, in order to discuss it, the moralist would have demanded *a division of the question*, to employ a parliamentary expression. The crime was suggested by passion, by one of those instances of feminine witchcraft so irresistible that no man can say: "I will never do that," when a siren takes a hand in the struggle and exerts her fascinations. The word of life therefore fell upon a mind new to the religious truths which the French Revolution and the life of a soldier had caused Castanier to neglect. The awful words: "You will be happy or unhappy throughout eternity!" made the more violent impression upon him because he had grown weary of earth, because he had shaken it like a tree without fruit, and because, in the impotence of his desires, nothing more was needed than that a certain point in heaven or

earth should be forbidden to him, to make his heart yearn for it. If we may be permitted to compare such momentous things with social trifles, he resembled those multi-millionaire bankers whom no one in society can resist, but who, not having been admitted to the circles of nobility, have no other desire than to be so admitted, and count for nothing all the social privileges they may have acquired so long as one is still lacking. That man, more powerful than all the kings on earth, that man, who could, like Satan, contend with God himself, stood leaning against one of the pillars of Saint-Sulpice, bowed by the weight of a sentiment and buried in thoughts of the future, even as Melmoth had buried himself.

“He is very fortunate!” cried Castanier, “he died with the certainty of going to heaven.”

Instantly a most complete change took place in the cashier's ideas. Having been a demon for several days, he was now a mere man once more, the image of the original fall commemorated in all cosmogonies. But, though he became outwardly small, he had acquired a source of inward grandeur, he had dipped into the infinite. The infernal power had revealed to him the divine power. His thirst for heaven was more intense than his hunger had been for earthly pleasures, so soon exhausted. The enjoyments the devil promises are only those of earth intensified, whereas the joys of heaven are without bounds. That man believed in God. The words that delivered the treasures of the world to him were as nothing in his sight, and those treasures seemed to

him as contemptible as pebbles are in the eyes of those who love diamonds; for, as he saw them, they were mere tinsel in comparison with the undying beauties of the other life. To his mind, any good coming from that source was accursed. He remained plunged in an abyss of dark shadows and depressing thoughts, listening to the service for Melmoth. The *Dies Iræ* terrified him. He understood in all its grandeur that cry of the penitent soul shuddering in presence of the Divine Majesty. He was suddenly consumed by the Holy Spirit as fire consumes straw. Tears flowed from his eyes.

"Are you a kinsman of the deceased?" inquired the beadle.

"His heir," replied Castanier.

"Something for the cost of the service!" cried the beadle.

"No," said the cashier, who did not choose to give the devil's money to the church.

"For the poor!"

"No."

"For repairing the church!"

"No."

"For the chapel of the Virgin!"

"No."

"For the seminary!"

"No."

Castanier withdrew, to avoid the angry glances of several churchmen.

"Why," he said to himself as he gazed at Saint-Sulpice, "why did men build these gigantic cathedrals,

which I have seen in all countries? This sentiment, which the masses have shared in all ages, must rest upon something."

"You call God something!" cried his conscience.
"God! God! God!"

That word, echoed by an inward voice, overwhelmed him, but his sensation of terror was allayed by the distant strains of the divine music which he had already vaguely heard. He attributed those harmonious sounds to the choir of the church, and gazed at the great doorway. But by listening more attentively, he found that the sound seemed to come from all sides; he looked about and saw no musicians anywhere. While that melody wafted into his soul the azure poesy and distant gleams of hope, it also increased the activity of the remorse which tormented the doomed man, who went about Paris as men go who are crushed by sorrow. He looked at everything and saw nothing, he walked at random after the manner of idlers; he stopped for no cause, talked to himself, and took no pains to avoid being struck by a board or the wheel of a carriage. Repentance insensibly delivered him over to that grace which crushes the heart gently and at the same time pitilessly. Soon there was in his face, as in Melmoth's, a something grand, but distraught; a cold, disconsolate expression like that of a man in despair, and the breathless eagerness born of hope; and, over and above all else, his heart was filled with disgust for all the good things of this inferior world. His glance, terrifying in its keenness,

concealed the most humble prayers. He suffered in proportion to his power. His soul, violently agitated, forced his body to bend, as a fierce wind bends the lofty firs. No more than his predecessor could he refuse to live, for he did not wish to die under the yoke of hell. His punishment became unendurable to him. At last, one morning, it occurred to him that Melmoth of blessed memory had suggested to him that he take his place and that he had accepted; that other men could undoubtedly be found who would do as he had done; and that, at an epoch whose fatal indifference in religious matters was loudly proclaimed by the inheritors of the eloquence of the Fathers of the Church, he ought easily to find a man who would agree to the stipulations of the contract in order to reap its advantages.

“There is a place where the value of kings is quoted, where nations are weighed, where systems are compared, where governments are measured by the crown of a hundred sous, where ideas and creeds are appraised, where everything is discounted, where God himself borrows and pledges his income in souls as surety, for the Pope has an account current there. If I can find a soul for sale anywhere, is not that the place?”

Castanier joyously bent his steps to the Bourse, thinking that he could traffic in a soul there as in the public funds. An ordinary man would have been afraid of being laughed at; but Castanier knew by experience that everything wears a serious aspect to the man in despair. Like the condemned felon who

would listen to a madman if he should tell him that by pronouncing certain absurd words he could fly away through the keyhole, the man who suffers is credulous and does not abandon an idea until it has failed, as the branch breaks in the hand of the drowning man. About four o'clock, Castanier made his appearance among the groups formed, after the close of dealings in public securities, for trading in private shares and for negotiating purely commercial transactions. He was acquainted with several merchants, and, by pretending to be in search of someone, was able to listen to the current rumors concerning men in embarrassed circumstances.

"Let me know, my boy, when I discount any of Claparon and Company's paper for you! They let the messenger from the Bank carry back their notes that came due this morning," said a stout banker in his blunt language. "If you have any of it, keep it!"

This Claparon was in the courtyard, talking earnestly with a man who was known to discount notes at usurious rates. Castanier at once walked toward them.

Claparon was a speculator noted for taking the chances of bold ventures which might ruin him as well as enrich him. When Castanier approached him, the money-lender had just left him and the speculator had allowed a gesture of despair to escape him.

"Well, Claparon, so we have a hundred thousand francs to pay at the Bank, and here it is four o'clock;

everybody knows it, and we have no time to arrange our little failure," said Castanier.

"Monsieur!"

"Speak lower," rejoined the cashier. "Suppose I should suggest a transaction in which you could pick up as much gold as you wanted?"

"It wouldn't pay my debts, for I don't know of any sort of a transaction that doesn't require time to cook."

"I know of one that would enable you to pay them in a moment," replied Castanier, "but which would require you to—"

"To what?"

"To sell your interest in paradise. Isn't that as legitimate a trade as any other? We are all stockholders in the great enterprise of eternity."

"Do you know that I'm just in the mood to horse-whip you?" said Claparon, angrily; "it isn't fair to crack foolish jokes on a man who is down!"

"I am speaking seriously," rejoined Castanier, taking a package of bank-notes from his pocket.

"In the first place," said Claparon, "I won't sell my soul to the devil for a trifle. I need five hundred thousand francs to go—"

"Who talks of being niggardly?" retorted Castanier, sharply. "You shall have more money than the Bank vaults will hold."

He held out a pile of notes which decided the speculator.

"Done!" said he. "But how do we arrange it?"

"Come over yonder where there isn't anybody," said Castanier, pointing to a corner of the courtyard.

Claparon and his tempter exchanged a few words, each with his face turned toward the wall. None of those who had noticed them guessed the object of that private conference, although their curiosity was keenly aroused by the extraordinary character of the gestures made by the two contracting parties. When Castanier returned, the bystanders uttered loud exclamations of amazement. As in all assemblages of Frenchmen, where the slightest incident attracts attention at once, all faces were turned toward the two men who were the cause of the excitement; and not without a feeling of horror did they observe the change that had taken place in them. At the Bourse, it is the common custom for brokers to walk about as they converse, so that everybody who is in the crowd is soon seen and observed, for the Bourse is like a large *bouillotte* table, where the skilful players are able to detect a man's style of play and the condition of his purse from his face. So it was that everyone had noticed Claparon's face and Castanier's. The latter, like the Irishman, was nervous and forceful, his eyes shone, his complexion was clear. Everyone had been amazed at that majestically terrible countenance and had wondered where worthy Castanier had obtained it; but Castanier, stripped of his power, was a faded, wrinkled, feeble, prematurely old man. When he led Claparon away, he was like a sick man in an attack of fever, or like

a *theriaki* in the momentary exaltation caused by opium; but, when he returned, he was in the state of prostration which follows fever and during which sick men expire, or else in the terrible depression caused by excessive indulgence in narcotics. The demoniacal spirit that had enabled him to endure his wild debauches had disappeared; the body was left alone, exhausted, without support, without protection against the assaults of remorse and the weight of true repentance. Claparon, whose mental suffering everyone had understood, reappeared, on the contrary, with gleaming eyes and the pride of Lucifer on his face. Bankruptcy had passed from one face to the other.

“Go and die in peace, old boy,” said Claparon to Castanier.

“In pity’s name, send for a carriage for me and a priest, the vicar of Saint-Sulpice!” replied the ex-dragon, sitting down on a stone.

The words “a priest” were overheard by several persons and aroused a sneering murmur from the brokers, a class of men whose only faith consists in the belief that a bit of paper called a certificate is worth a domain. The register of the public debt is their Bible.

“Shall I have time to repent?” said Castanier in a piteous voice that made a deep impression on Claparon.

A cab carried away the moribund. The speculator went at once to pay his notes at the Bank. The impression produced by the sudden change of face

between the two men faded away in the crowd as the wake of a ship fades away on the sea. News of the utmost importance aroused the attention of the business world. At that hour, when every selfish interest is at stake, Moses, appearing with his two luminous horns, would hardly obtain the honors of a pun, and would be denied by men preparing to make *reports*. When Claparon had paid his notes, he was stricken with dread. He was convinced of his power, returned to the Bourse, and offered his bargain to other embarrassed traders. "The investment in the consols of hell, with the privileges attached to the enjoyment thereof," according to the expression of a notary whom Claparon made his successor, brought seven hundred thousand francs. The notary sold the treaty with the devil for five hundred thousand to a building contractor, who disposed of it for three hundred thousand to an ironmonger; and he passed it on to a carpenter for two hundred thousand. At last, about five o'clock, no one believed in the strange contract, and purchasers were shy from lack of faith.

At half-past five, the owner was a house-painter, who was standing near the door of the temporary Bourse, then located on Rue Feydeau. This house-painter, a simple-minded creature, did not know what he had within him. "It was everything," he said to his wife, when he went home.

Rue Feydeau is, as all idlers know, one of those streets beloved of young men who, in default of a mistress, marry the whole sex. On the first floor

of the most commonplace and respectable of houses, dwelt one of those ravishing creatures whom Heaven delights to overburden with the rarest charms, and who, as they cannot be duchesses or queens, because there are more pretty women than titles or thrones, content themselves with a banker or a broker, whom they make happy at a stated price. This excellent and lovely maiden, called Euphrasie, was the object of the ambition of a notary's clerk whose ambition was immeasurable. In truth, this second clerk of Maître Crottat, notary, was in love with that woman as young men are wont to be in love at twenty-two. He would have murdered the Pope and the whole college of cardinals to procure a paltry hundred louis which were required by Euphrasie for the purchase of a shawl which had turned her head, and in exchange for which sum her maid had promised her to the clerk. The lovelorn youth paced back and forth in front of Madame Euphrasie's windows, like the white bears in their cages at the Jardin des Plantes. He had thrust his right hand under his waistcoat, over his left breast, and was trying to tear out his heart, but had succeeded only in twisting the elastics of his suspenders.

"What can I do to get ten thousand francs?" he was saying to himself. "Take the money I am to carry with me when that deed is registered? Great God! that loan won't ruin the purchaser, he's a millionaire seven times over!—To-morrow I will throw myself at his feet, and say: 'Monsieur, I have taken ten thousand francs of yours, I am twenty-two years

old, and I love Euphrasie—that's my story. My father is rich, he will pay you the money, don't ruin me! Haven't you ever been twenty-two years old and mad with love?" But these miserly landowners have no souls! He's quite capable of turning me over to the king's attorney instead of being touched. *Sacredieu!* if one could only sell his soul to the devil! But there's no God or devil either, they're all fiddle-faddle, you never hear of them except in blue books and from old women. What shall I do?"

"If you choose to sell your soul to the devil," said the house-painter, who had overheard some of the clerk's words, "you will have ten thousand francs."

"Then I shall have Euphrasie," said the clerk, grasping at the bargain proposed to him by the devil in the guise of a house-painter.

The compact consummated, the frantic clerk went and bought the shawl, rushed up to Madame Euphrasie's apartment, and, as he had the devil in him, he remained there twelve days without once going out, squandering all his paradise there, thinking only of love and its orgies, in which the memory of hell and its privileges was submerged.

Thus was the extraordinary power acquired by the discovery of the Irishman, the offspring of the reverend Mathurin, destroyed.

It was impossible for certain orientlists, mystics, and archæologists interested in such matters to decide upon the method of invoking the demon. For this reason:

On the thirteenth day of his insane nuptials, the poor clerk lay on his pallet in an attic in his employer's house on Rue Saint-Honoré. *Shame*, that stupid goddess who dares not look at herself, took possession of the young man, who fell sick; he attempted to doctor himself, and made a mistake in the dose of a curative drug which we owe to the genius of a man well known on the walls of Paris. So the clerk died from an overdose of quicksilver, and his dead body turned as black as a mole's back. Some devil had certainly passed that way, but what one? Was it Astaroth?

"This estimable young man has been taken to the planet Mercury," said the chief clerk to a German demonologist who came to investigate the affair.

"I can readily believe it," said the German.

"Ah!"

"Yes, monsieur," he continued, "that opinion accords with Jacob Bœhm's own words in his forty-eighth proposition concerning the *Threefold Life of Man*, wherein it is said that 'if God accomplishes all things by his FIAT, the FIAT is the secret matrix which comprehends and grasps the nature formed by the spirit born of Mercury and God.'"

"I beg your pardon, monsieur?"

The German repeated his citation.

"We don't understand," said the clerks.

"*Fiat!*" said one of them, "*fiat lux!*"

"You can satisfy yourselves of the accuracy of this citation," said the German, "by reading the

passage, on page 75, of the *Threefold Life of Man*, published in 1809 by Monsieur Migneret, and translated by a philosopher, a great admirer of the illustrious cobbler."

"Ah! he was a cobbler, was he?" said the chief clerk. "Think of that!"

"In Prussia!" replied the German.

"Did he work for the king?" asked an unlettered second clerk.

"He ought to have put patches on his sentences," said the third clerk.

"That man is pyramidal!" cried the fourth clerk, pointing to the German.

Although he was a demonologist of the first order, the stranger did not know what mischievous devils clerks are; he went away, not understanding their jests, and convinced that those young men considered Bœhm a pyramidal genius.

"There is education in France," he said to himself.

Paris, May 6, 1835.

THE ELIXIR OF LONG LIFE

TO THE READER

At the outset of the author's literary life, a friend long since dead suggested to him the subject of this Study, which he subsequently found in a collection of stories published about the beginning of this century; and, according to his conjecture, it is a fantastic creation written by Hoffman, of Berlin, probably published in some German almanac, and overlooked by his publishers in collecting his works. The HUMAN COMEDY is sufficiently rich in original inventions for the author to avow an innocent plagiarism; like honest La Fontaine, he has treated in his own way, and unwittingly, a tale already told. This was not one of the varieties of humor fashionable in 1830, a period when every author *did the atrocious* to amuse young girls. When you reach Don Juan's refined parricide, try to guess how, under almost identical circumstances, the honest folk would behave, who, in the nineteenth century, take an annuity on the strength of a chronic catarrh, or those who let a house to an old woman for the rest of her days? Would they try to bring their tenants to life? I should be very glad if sworn weighers of consciences would examine the question of what similarity there can possibly be between Don Juan and those fathers who give their children in marriage because of hopes. Does human society, which is advancing in the path of progress, according to the view of some philosophers, consider the art of waiting for dead men's shoes a step in the right direction? That art has given birth to honorable professions, by means of which men live on death. It is the business of certain people to hope for somebody's death, they brood over it, they squat on a dead body every morning and use it for a pillow at night: they are the coadjutors, the cardinals, the supernumeraries, tontine holders, etc. Add to these, many persons of delicate sensibilities, who

are anxious to buy an estate the price of which exceeds their means, but who coolly and logically reckon the chances of life remaining to their fathers, mothers-in-law, septuagenarians or octogenarians, saying: "Within three years, I must necessarily inherit, and then—" A murderer disgusts us less than a spy. The murderer may have yielded to an impulse of frenzy, he may repent, become a noble man. But the spy is always a spy: he is a spy at table, on his promenades, in bed, night and day; he is vile every instant. What would it be, then, to be a murderer as vile as a spy! But have you not discovered, in the heart of our society, a multitude of creatures led by our laws, by our morals, by our customs, to think incessantly about the death of their kindred, to long for it? They consider the value of a coffin as they haggle over the price of shawls for their wives, as they ascend the staircase at the theatre, as they think longingly of the Bouffons, as they wish that they owned a carriage. They are committing murder at the very moment when dear little creatures, fascinating in their innocence, offer their infantile lips to be kissed, saying: "Good-night, *father!*" Every hour in the day they see eyes that they would like to close, but which open every morning to the light, like Belvidero's in this Study. God only knows of how many parricides they are guilty in thought! Imagine a man having to pay an annuity of three thousand francs to an old woman, and both of them living in the country, separated by a brook, but so far strangers that they can hate each other cordially without violating those social proprieties which place a mask on the faces of two brothers, one of whom has the entail and the other a second son's share. All European civilization rests upon HEREDITY as upon a pivot, it would be madness to suppress it; but might we not try, as in the case of the machines which are the pride of our age, to perfect that all-important mechanism?

The author's purpose in retaining the old formula, *To the Reader*, at the head of a work in which he aims to represent all literary forms, is to place herein a remark relating to several of his Studies, especially to this one. Each one of his

compositions is based upon ideas more or less new, to which it seemed to him that it might be well to give expression; he may insist upon the priority of certain forms and ideas which have since passed into the domain of literature and have, in some cases, become vulgarized there. The date of the original publication of each Study should not be a matter of indifference to those of his readers who wish to do him justice.

Reading gives us unknown friends, and what a friend is a reader! We have friends whom we know who read nothing that we write! The author hopes to have paid his debt by dedicating this work to the UNKNOWN GODS.

In a superb palace at Ferrara, on a winter evening, Don Juan Belvidero was entertaining a prince of the House of Este. At that period, a banquet was a marvellous spectacle which only royal wealth or the power of a great nobleman could command. Seated about a table lighted by perfumed candles, seven hilarious women were conversing pleasantly, amid beautiful chefs-d'œuvres of art whose white marble stood out in bold relief against the red stucco of the walls and in striking contrast to the rich Turkish rugs. Dressed in satin, gleaming with gold and laden with precious stones less brilliant than their eyes, one and all were telling tales of violent passions, differing as widely as the charms of the narrators. But they differed neither in words nor gestures; an expression of the eyes, a glance, a gesture or two, or the tone of voice, served as commentaries, lascivious, riotous, melancholy, or cunning, upon their words.

One seemed to say: "My beauty is of the sort that warms an old man's frozen heart."

Another: "I love to lie on cushions and think with ecstasy of those who adore me."

A third, a novice at such functions, was inclined to blush: "In the bottom of my heart I feel remorse!" she said. "I am a Catholic, and I am afraid of hell. But I love you so dearly, oh! so dearly, and so dearly, that I can sacrifice eternity to you."

A fourth, emptying a cup of Chio wine, cried: "*Vive la gaieté!* I begin a new life every morning! Oblivious of the past, still drunken from the joys of the preceding day, every night I exhaust a life of happiness, a life full of love!"

The woman sitting beside Belvidero gazed at him with flashing eyes. She was silent. "I would not trust to hired *bravoes* to kill my lover if he abandoned me!" Then she had laughed; but her hand convulsively crushed a sweetmeat-box of exquisitely carved gold.

"When will you be Grand Duke?" the sixth woman asked the prince, with an expression of murderous joy in her teeth, and the delirium of wine in her eyes.

"And when will your father die?" laughed the seventh, tossing her bouquet to Don Juan with a gesture intoxicating in its wantonness. She was an innocent girl, accustomed to make sport of all sacred things.

"Oh! do not speak of it!" cried the young and handsome Don Juan Belvidero; "there is but one everlasting father in the world, and cruel fate decreed that I should have him!"

The seven courtesans of Ferrara, Don Juan's friends, and the prince himself uttered a cry of horror. Two hundred years later, under Louis XV., people of refined taste would have laughed at that sally. But it may be that, at the beginning of a debauch, their minds were still too lucid. Despite the flame of the candles, the outcry of the passions, the sight of gold and silver vessels, the fumes of wine, despite the contemplation of the most ravishingly beautiful women, perhaps there still survived, in the depths of their hearts, a little of that shamefaced respect for things human and divine which struggles on until revelry has drowned it in the last waves of sparkling wine. Nevertheless, the flowers were already crushed, eyes were beginning to glare wildly, and drunkenness was making its way, as Rabelais expresses it, even to the sandals. During that momentary pause, a door opened; and, as at the feast of Belshazzar, God made himself manifest in the person of an old servant, with white hair, trembling footsteps, and wrinkled brow; he entered the room with melancholy mien, cast a withering glance at the garlands, the silver-gilt cups, the pyramids of fruit, the splendor of the banquet, the purple flush upon the astonished faces, and the brilliant colors of the cushions crushed by the white arms of women; then he cast a pall upon the riotous assemblage by uttering in a hollow voice the fateful words:

“Signore, your father is dying!”

Don Juan rose, with a wave of the hand to his

guests which might be translated: "Excuse me, this doesn't happen every day."

Does not a father's death often surprise young people amid the splendors of life, amid the insane ideas of a debauch? Death is as abrupt in her caprices as a courtesan in her disdain, but more faithful—it never deceives anyone.

When Don Juan had closed the door of the banquet-hall and was walking along a cold, unlighted corridor, he forced himself to assume a theatrical expression of grief; for, reflecting upon his rôle of son, he had cast his merriment aside with his napkin. The night was very dark. The silent servant who led the young man toward the mortuary chamber lighted his master but dimly, so that DEATH, seconded by the cold, the silence, the darkness, by the reaction after drunkenness, perhaps, was able to insinuate a few thoughts into that rake's mind; he reviewed his past life, and became as pensive as a man under indictment on his way to the courtroom.

Bartholomeo Belvidero, Don Juan's father, was an old man of ninety, who had passed the greater part of his life in active commercial pursuits. Having often travelled in the talismanic countries of the Orient, he had amassed immense wealth there and had acquired knowledge far more precious, he said, than gold and diamonds, for which he cared but little. "I prefer a tooth to a ruby, and power to learning!" he would sometimes exclaim, with a smile. That excellent father loved to have Don Juan tell him of some youthful escapade, and would say to him, with

a cunning leer, as he lavished gold upon him: "My dear child, do nothing but the foolish things that amuse you." He was the only old man who ever took pleasure in looking at a young man; paternal affection enabled him to forget his own decay by contemplating such lusty life. At the age of sixty, Belvidero had fallen in love with an angel of peace and beauty. Don Juan was the only fruit of that belated and ephemeral passion. For fifteen years the goodman had bewailed the loss of his dear Juana. His numerous servants and his son attributed to his sorrow the strange habits he had contracted. Taking refuge in the least accessible wing of his palace, Bartholomeo very rarely left it, and even Don Juan could not gain admission to his father's apartments without having first obtained leave. If that self-willed anchorite walked about the palace or in the streets of Ferrara, he seemed to be seeking something that he wanted; he walked dreamily, with indecision, preoccupied like a man at war with an idea or a memory. While the young man gave sumptuous entertainments and the palace echoed with the outbursts of his mirth, while horses pawed the earth in the courtyard, and pages quarrelled over their dice on the steps, Bartholomeo ate seven ounces of bread per day and drank water. If he asked for a little chicken, it was for the purpose of giving the bones to a black spaniel, his faithful companion. He never complained of the noise. When he was ill, if the sound of the horn and the barking of dogs disturbed his sleep, he would simply say: "Ah! Don

Juan has returned!" Never on this earth was so unobtrusive and indulgent a father known; and young Belvidero, being accustomed to treat him without ceremony, had all the faults of spoiled children; he lived with Bartholomeo as a capricious courtesan lives with an aged lover, obtaining pardon for an impertinence by a smile, selling her good humor, and allowing herself to be loved.

As he mentally reconstructed the picture of his youthful years, Don Juan realized that it would be very hard to find a flaw in his father's kindness. Listening to a remorseful feeling that sprang to life deep down in his heart, as he walked along the corridor, he felt that he was almost ready to forgive Belvidero for having lived so long. He opened his heart to sentiments of filial affection, as a thief becomes an honest man by virtue of the prospective enjoyment of a million, safely hidden away. Soon the young man entered the bare, high-studded rooms that composed his father's suite. Oppressed by the damp atmosphere, breathing the dense air, the musty odor exhaled by old tapestries and dust-covered cupboards, he found himself in the old man's old-fashioned bedroom, beside a disgustingly filthy bed and a dying fire. A lamp that stood on a Gothic table cast, at unequal intervals, a flickering light of varying brilliancy upon the bed, and thus exhibited the old man's face in constantly changing aspects. The wind whistled through the rattling window-frames, and the snow beat upon the panes with a dull sound. The scene presented such a violent contrast to that

which Don Juan had just left, that he could not repress a sudden start. Then he turned cold when, on drawing near the bed, a sudden flare of light, caused by a gust of wind, illumined his father's face: the features were distorted, the skin, drawn tight over the bones, had a greenish tinge, which the whiteness of the pillow on which the old man's head lay rendered even more ghastly; the toothless mouth, drawn by pain and partly open, emitted an occasional deep sigh, lugubrious to the last degree, and prolonged by the howling of the gale. Despite those indications of dissolution, an indescribable expression of power shone upon that face. A powerful mind was contending there with death. The eyes, hollowed by disease, maintained a strange fixity of expression. It seemed as if Bartholomeo were trying to slay, with his dying glance, an enemy seated at the foot of his bed. That glance, cold and unwavering, was the more terrifying to behold, in that the head was as absolutely motionless as a skull on a physician's table. The body and the limbs, whose outlines could be followed beneath the bedclothes, were equally rigid. Everything was dead except the eyes. There was something mechanical in the sounds that issued from the mouth.

Don Juan was somewhat ashamed to appear at his dying father's bedside with a courtesan's bouquet in his bosom and to bring thither the perfumes of the banquet and the fumes of wine.

"You were enjoying yourself!" cried the old man when he perceived his son.

At the same moment, the clear, pure voice of a woman singing for the entertainment of the guests, supported by the chords of a viol upon which she accompanied herself, drowned the howling of the storm and penetrated to the chamber of death. Don Juan tried not to listen to that brutal confirmation of his father's words.

"I do not reproach you, my child," said Bartholomeo.

Those gentle words stung Don Juan to the quick; he could not forgive his father for that poignant kindness.

"How full of remorse I am, father!" he said, hypocritically.

"Poor Juanino," replied the dying man, in a hollow voice, "I have always been so indulgent to you, that you could not wish for my death, could you?"

"Oh!" cried Don Juan, "if only it were possible to restore your life by giving up a part of my own!—One can always say that sort of thing with safety," thought the rake; "it's as if I should offer my mistress the whole world!"

He had hardly completed that reflection when the old spaniel barked. That intelligent voice made Don Juan shudder, he believed that the dog had read his thoughts.

"I was sure that I could rely upon you, my son!" cried the moribund. "I shall live. Your wish shall be gratified, I say. I shall live, but without depriving you of a single day that belongs to you."

"He is delirious," said Don Juan to himself.—
"Yes, my dearest father," he added, aloud, "of a certainty, you will live as long as I do, for your image will always be in my heart."

"I am not referring to that life," said the old nobleman, collecting his strength to sit up in bed, for he was seized by one of those suspicions which are born only beneath the pillows of dying men.—
"Hark ye, my son," he continued, in a voice weakened by this last effort, "I am no more anxious to die than you are to do without mistresses, wine, horses, falcons, dogs, and gold."

"I can well believe it," thought the son, kneeling at the bedside and kissing one of Bartholomeo's cadaverous hands.—"But," he said, aloud, "we must bow to God's will, my dear father."

"I am God!" mumbled the old man.

"Do not blaspheme!" cried the youth, when he saw the menacing expression assumed by his father's features. "Beware of blaspheming, for you have received extreme unction, and I could never be comforted if I knew that you had died in a state of sin."

"Will you listen to me?" cried the dying man, gnashing his teeth.

Don Juan held his peace. A ghastly silence reigned in the room. Amid the dull hissing of the snow, the strains of the viol and the lovely voice still reached their ears, faint as the first glimmer of dawn. The moribund smiled.

"I thank you for inviting singers, for bringing music with you! A banquet, young and lovely

women, soft and white, with black hair! all the pleasures of life. Bid them remain, I am about to be born again."

"The delirium is at its height," said Don Juan to himself.

"I have discovered a means of renewing life. Look in the table-drawer, you can open it by pressing a spring hidden by the griffin."

"I have it, father."

"Very well, take a small phial of rock-crystal."

"Here it is."

"I have spent twenty years—"

At that moment, the old man felt that his end was approaching, and he summoned all his strength to say:

"As soon as I have drawn my last breath, you will rub me with that water from head to foot; I shall come to life again."

"There's very little of it," rejoined the young man.

Although Bartholomeo could no longer speak, he was still able to see and hear; at those words, he turned his head toward Don Juan with a frightfully sudden movement, his neck remained twisted like that of a statue which the sculptor's fancy has condemned to look sidewise, and his eyes became fixed in a hideous stare. He was dead, dead at the moment of losing his last, his only illusion. Upon seeking a sure refuge in his son's heart, he found there a grave deeper than men are accustomed to give their dead. Hence his hair stood erect in horror,

and his convulsive glance still spoke. He was a father rising in a frenzy from his sepulchre to demand vengeance at the hand of God.

“Well, it is all over with the good man at last!” cried Don Juan.

In his haste to examine the mysterious phial by the light of the lamp, as a toper consults his bottle at the end of his repast, he had not seen his father’s eye blanch. The panting dog looked alternately at his dead master and the elixir, just as Don Juan looked from his father to the phial. The lamp cast a flickering light. The silence was profound, the viol mute. Belvidero started, fancying that he saw his father move. Terrified by the rigid expression of the accusing eyes, he closed them, as he would have closed a blind that was banging in the wind on an autumn night. He stood motionless as a statue, lost in a whole world of reflections. Suddenly a shrill sound like the shriek of a key in a rusty lock broke the silence. Don Juan, in his surprise, nearly dropped the phial. A sweat colder than the blade of a dagger issued from every pore. A painted wooden cock arose above a clock and crowed three times. It was one of those ingenious pieces of mechanism by whose aid the scientists of that day were awakened in the morning at the hour when their labors were to begin. Already the first flush of dawn was reddening the window-panes. Don Juan had passed ten hours in reflection. The old clock was more faithful in its service than he was in performing his duties toward Bartholomeo. Its mechanism consisted

of wood, pulleys, cords, and wheels, whereas he had the mechanism peculiar to man, called a heart. In order to avoid further risk of losing the mysterious liquid, the sceptical Don Juan replaced it in the drawer of the little Gothic table. At that solemn moment, he heard an uproar in the corridors; there were confused voices, stifled laughter, light steps, the rustling of silk—in a word, the noise of a joyous party trying to find its way. The door opened, and the prince, Don Juan's friends, the seven courtesans, and the musicians appeared in the doorway, in the fantastic disorder of dancers surprised by the break of day, when the sun is contending for the mastery with the paling flames of the candles. They all came to offer the young heir the customary condolences.

"Oho! can it be that Don Juan takes this affair seriously?" said the prince in La Brambilla's ear.

"Why, his father was a very good man," she replied.

Meanwhile, Don Juan's nocturnal meditations had imparted to his features an expression so striking that it imposed silence on the party. The men stood motionless. The women, whose lips were parched with wine, whose cheeks were blotched by kisses, knelt and began to pray. Don Juan could not repress a shudder as he saw splendor, joy, laughter, singing, youth, beauty, power, the whole of life prostrating itself thus in the presence of death. But, in that adorable Italy, debauchery and religion worked so well together in those days, that religion was a

debauch, and debauchery a religion! The prince warmly pressed Don Juan's hand; then, every face having assumed at the same moment an identical grimace, expressive of sorrow and indifference in equal parts, the phantasmagoria disappeared, leaving the room empty. It was a faithful image of life!

As they went down the steps, the prince said to La Rivabarella:

"Well, well! who'd have believed that Don Juan would be such an impious braggart? He loves his father!"

"Did you notice the black dog?" asked La Brambilla.

"Well, he's immensely rich now," observed Bianca Cavatolino, with a sigh.

"What care I!" cried the proud Veronese, she who had crushed the sweetmeat-box.

"What care you, say you?" cried the duke.
"With his ducats he's as much a prince as I!"

At first, Don Juan, swayed by a multitude of conflicting thoughts, wavered between several alternatives. Having taken counsel of the treasure amassed by his father, he returned toward evening to the death-chamber, his soul heavy with revolting selfishness. He found all the retainers of the household engaged in putting together the decorations of the bed upon which the *late monsignore* was to lie in state on the morrow in the centre of a superb mortuary chamber—a curious spectacle, which all Ferrara was expected to see and admire. Don Juan made

a gesture, and his servants paused in their work, abashed and trembling.

"Leave me here alone," he said in an altered voice; "you will not return until I am gone."

When the footsteps of the old servant, who was the last to go, had died away in the distance, Don Juan hurriedly closed and locked the door, and, sure that he was alone, exclaimed :

"Let us try!"

Bartholomeo's body lay upon a long table. To conceal from all eyes the revolting spectacle of a dead body which, because of its extreme decrepitude and gauntness, resembled a skeleton, the embalmers had spread over it a cloth which enveloped it completely, except the head. The mummy-like object lay in the centre of the room, and the cloth, naturally pliable, marked vaguely the rigid, angular, and emaciated outlines of the figure. The face was already marked by large violet blotches which indicated the necessity of finishing the embalming process. Despite the scepticism with which he was armed, Don Juan trembled as he uncorked the magic phial. When he stood beside the head, he was obliged to wait a moment, he trembled so. But that young man had been, in his early youth, cunningly corrupted by the morals of a dissolute court; so that a reflection worthy of the Duke of Urbino inspired him with a courage which was quickened by a feeling of the keenest curiosity; indeed, it seemed as if the evil one himself had whispered to him these words, which echoed in his heart: *Moisten one eye!* He took a

piece of linen, and, after moistening it sparingly in the precious liquid, he touched lightly the right eyelid of the corpse. The eye opened.

"Aha!" exclaimed Don Juan, grasping the phial as, in a dream, we grasp the branch from which we are suspended over a precipice.

He saw an eye sparkling with life, a child's eye in a death's-head, the light trembled in the clear aqueous fluid; and, sheltered by two black lashes, it sparkled like the solitary lights the traveller spies on a winter's night in a lonely country-side. That flashing eye seemed to long to spring at Don Juan, and it thought, spoke, accused, tried, condemned, threatened; it cried aloud and bit. All the human passions were astir in it. There were the most loving entreaties, a kingly wrath, the love of a maiden craving mercy from her executioners; and, lastly, the profound, meaning glance which a man ascending the steps leading to the scaffold casts upon his fellow-man. Such abundant life shone in that fragment of life that Don Juan recoiled in dismay; he paced back and forth, afraid to look at that eye, which glared at him from the floor, from the hangings. The room was studded with gleaming points, full of fire, life, intelligence. On all sides were blazing eyes that barked at his heels.

"He might have lived another hundred years," he exclaimed involuntarily, as he stood gazing at that luminous spark, drawn back to his father's side by a diabolical influence.

Suddenly the intelligent eye closed and opened

again rapidly, like the eye of a woman who consents. Had a voice said: "Yes!" Don Juan would have been no more frightened.

"What shall I do?" he thought.

He mustered courage to try to close the white lid. His efforts were unavailing.

"Shall I put it out? Perhaps that would be parricide?" he said to himself.

"Yes," said the eye, with a wink of ghastly irony.

"Aha!" cried Don Juan, "there's witchcraft in it."

He put out his hand to destroy the eye. A great tear rolled down the hollow cheeks of the corpse and fell upon Belvidero's hand.

"It is burning hot!" he cried, throwing himself upon a chair.

The struggle had fatigued him as if, like Jacob, he had been contending against an angel.

At last, he rose, saying:

"If only there is no blood!"

Then, summoning all the courage that one requires to do a cowardly deed, he destroyed the eye, forcing it out with a cloth, but without looking at it. An unexpected but heart-rending groan startled him. The poor spaniel expired howling.

"Can he be in the secret?" said Don Juan to himself, gazing at the faithful animal.

Don Juan Belvidero was esteemed a dutiful son. He erected a monument of white marble on his father's tomb, and entrusted the execution of the

figures to the most famous artists of the time. He was not perfectly at ease on the day when the statue of his father kneeling at the feet of Religion imposed its enormous weight upon the grave at the bottom of which he buried the only feeling of remorse that had ever touched his heart in moments of physical weariness. By dint of gloating over the vast wealth amassed by the old merchant, Don Juan became miserly: had he not two lives to provide with money? His profoundly searching glance penetrated to the basic principle of social life, and embraced the world the more effectively because he viewed it through a tomb. He analyzed men and things in order to be done once and for all with the past, represented by history; with the present, represented by the law; with the future, revealed by religion. He took the soul and matter, threw them into a crucible, found nothing, and thereupon became DON JUAN !

Master of life's illusions, he plunged headlong, young and handsome as he was, into life, despising the world, but taking possession of the world. His happiness could not be the bourgeoisie felicity that feeds upon a dish of boiled beef at stated intervals, a comfortable warming-pan in winter, a lamp for the evening, and new slippers every quarter. No; he seized upon existence as a monkey seizes a nut, and, without being entertained for long, he skilfully peeled off the vulgar envelopes of the fruit to relish the savory pulp. Poetry and the sublime transports of human passion no longer appealed to him. He

did not commit the error of those strong men who, fancying sometimes that small minds believe in great ones, think of exchanging lofty thoughts of the future for the small change of our ephemeral ideas. He might, like them, have walked with his feet on the earth and his head in the clouds; but he preferred to sit and dry with his kisses the lips of more than one loving, lovely, and perfumed woman; for, like Death, wherever he went he devoured everything without shame, desiring the love of absolute possession, an oriental love, long-enduring, unresisting pleasure. Loving *woman* only in women, he made irony the natural bent of his mind. When his mistresses made use of a bed to ascend to the skies where they proposed to lose themselves in the embrace of intoxicating bliss, Don Juan would accompany them, grave, unreserved, and as sincere as ever German student could be. But he said *I*, when his mistress, in a frenzy of passion, said *WE*. He was admirably skilled in the art of allowing himself to be drawn on by a woman. He was always able to make her believe that he was trembling like a young collegian who says to his first partner at a ball: "Do you like dancing?" But he also knew how to roar on occasion, to draw his mighty sword, and crush the commanders. There was mockery in his simplicity and laughter in his tears, for he could always weep as a woman weeps when she says to her husband: "Give me a carriage, or I shall die of consumption."—In the eyes of merchants, the world is a bale of merchandise or a package of notes

in circulation; to most young men it is a woman; to some women it is a man; to certain minds it is a salon, a club, a quarter, a city; in Don Juan's eyes, the world was himself! A model of charming and noble manners, of fascinating wit, he moored his boat to every shore; but, while inviting guidance, he went only where he wished to be guided. The more he saw, the more he doubted. By scrutinizing men, he often divined that courage was rashness; prudence, poltroonery; generosity, cunning; justice, a crime; delicacy of feeling, mere folly; probity, a matter of temperament; and, by a strange fatality, he discovered that those persons who were really upright, refined, just, generous, prudent and brave, obtained no consideration among men.

"What sardonic jesting!" he said to himself. "It does not come from a God."

And thereupon, renouncing the idea of a better world, he did not bare his head at the mention of a name, and looked upon the stone saints in the churches simply as works of art. Moreover, being familiar with the machinery of human society, he never jostled prejudices too rudely, because he was not so powerful as the executioner; but he circumvented social laws with the grace and wit so well depicted in his scene with Monsieur Dimanche. He was, in truth, the perfect type of Molière's *Don Juan*, of Gæthe's *Faust*, of Byron's *Manfred*, and of Maturrin's *Melmoth*. Colossal images drawn by the most colossal geniuses of Europe, which, perhaps, Mozart's strains will no more fail to illustrate than Rossini's

lyre! Terrifying images, which the principle of evil, existing in man, makes eternal, and of which some copies are found in every age: entering into a parley with mankind, it may be, as in the case of Mirabeau; or content to act in silence, like Bonaparte; or to compress the whole world into an ironical phrase, like the divine Rabelais; or laughing at persons instead of insulting things, like the Maréchal de Richelieu; or, better still, making sport of men and things at the same time, like the most famous of our ambassadors. But the profound genius of Don Juan Belvidero was a summing up, by anticipation, of all those geniuses. He mocked at everything. His life was one long mockery, which embraced men, things, institutions, ideas. As for eternity, he had talked confidentially for half an hour with Pope Julius II., and at the close of the conversation he said to him, with a laugh:

“If it is absolutely necessary to choose, I prefer to believe in God rather than in the devil; power united to goodness always presents more resources than the genius of evil can command.”

“True, but it is God’s will that we do penance in this world—”

“So you still believe in your indulgences?” replied Belvidero. “Very well, I have a whole existence in reserve to do penance for the sins of my first life.”

“Oh! if that is your understanding of old age,” cried the Pope, “you are in danger of being canonized.”

"After your elevation to the papacy, one can believe anything."

And they went to watch the workmen engaged in building the immense basilica consecrated to Saint Peter.

"Saint Peter is the man of genius who gave us our twofold power," said the Pope to Don Juan, "he deserves the monument. But sometimes, at night, I think that a deluge will pass a sponge over it and we shall be obliged to begin anew."

Don Juan and the Pope laughed heartily, they had understood each other. A fool would have gone the next day to seek recreation with Julius II. at Raphael's house, or at the lovely Villa Madama; but Belvidero went to see him officiate as pontiff, in order to be relieved of his doubts. In a debauch, Rovere might have belied his sacred character and commented on the *Apocalypse*.

However, this legend was not undertaken to furnish material for those who may wish to write memoirs of Don Juan's life; its purpose is to prove to honest persons that Belvidero did not die in his duel with a stone, as some lithographers would have us believe.

When Don Juan Belvidero reached the age of sixty, he settled in Spain. There, in his old age, he married a young and enchanting Andalusian. But, by design, he was neither a good father nor a good husband. He had noticed that we are never so fondly loved as by the women for whom we care but little. Donna Elvire, who had been piously reared

by an old aunt in the depths of Andalusia, in a château a few leagues from San-Lucar, was all devotion and all charm. Don Juan rightly guessed that she was a woman who would fight long against a passion before yielding to it, so he hoped to keep her virtuous until his death. It was a serious jest, a game of chess which he proposed to play during his declining days. Strong in his knowledge of all the mistakes made by his father Bartholomeo, Don Juan determined to make the most trivial acts of his old age assist in the success of the drama that was to be enacted beside his death-bed. For instance, the greater part of his wealth was buried in the vaults of his palace at Ferrara, where he went but rarely. As for the other half of his fortune, it was invested in an annuity, in order that both his wife and his children should be interested in the prolongation of his life, a species of trickery which his father would have done well to practise; but that species of machiavelianism was not very necessary to him. Young Philippe Belvidero, his son, grew to be a Spaniard as conscientiously religious as his father was impious, by virtue, perhaps, of the proverb: *Miserly father, prodigal son.*

The abbé of San-Lucar was chosen by Don Juan to guide the consciences of the Duchess of Belvidero and Philippe. That ecclesiastic was a saintly man, of fine figure, admirably well-proportioned, with handsome black eyes, a head worthy of Tiberius, emaciated by fasting, pale from macerations, and beset by temptation day after day, as all recluses

are. The old nobleman hoped, perhaps, that he might be able to kill a monk before the end of his first lease of life. But, whether it was that the abbé was as strong as Don Juan himself, or that Donna Elvire had more prudence or more virtue than Spain attributes to woman, Don Juan was constrained to pass his last days like an old country curate, without scandal, at his own fireside. Sometimes he seemed to enjoy finding his wife or his son at fault in respect to their religious duties, and imperiously demanded that they execute all the obligations imposed on the faithful by the court of Rome. Indeed, he was never so happy as when he was listening to the gallant abbé of San Lucar, Donna Elvire, and Philippe discussing a case of conscience. Meanwhile, notwithstanding the prodigious care that Don Juan de Belvidero bestowed on his person, the days of decrepitude arrived; with that period of distress came the outcries of impotence, outcries more heart-rending in proportion to his pride in the memories of his effervescent youth and voluptuous maturity. That man, in whose mind the climax of mockery consisted in persuading others to believe in the laws and principles of which he made sport, fell asleep at night upon a *perhaps!* That model of good taste, that duke, of matchless vigor in a debauch, magnificent at courts, charming in his manner to women whose hearts he had twisted as the peasant twists an osier band, that man of genius was afflicted by an obstinate catarrh, pitiless sciatica, brutal gout. He watched his teeth leaving him, as the fairest and

most beautifully dressed women go away, one by one, at the end of a party, leaving the salon deserted and bare. His bold hands trembled, his slim legs tottered, and one evening apoplexy grasped his neck with its ice-cold, hooked fingers. After that fatal day, he became morose and stern. He slandered the devotion of his son and wife, declaring at times that their delicate and touching attentions were lavished upon him with such a show of affection only because he had invested his whole fortune in an annuity. At such times, Elvire and Philippe would shed bitter tears and redouble their caresses, whereupon the old man's cracked voice would assume an affectionate tone as he said to them:

“My friends, my dear wife, you will forgive me, won't you? I torment you a little. Alas! O God, why dost Thou make use of me to test the virtues of these two heavenly creatures? I, who should be their joy, am a scourge to them.”

In that way he chained them to his pillow, making them forget whole months of testiness and cruelty by a single hour in which he displayed the ever-new treasures of his fascinating manners and of a pretended affection. A paternal system which succeeded infinitely better than that which his father had formerly adopted toward him. At last his illness reached such a dangerous stage that it was necessary to put him to bed, and to that end to handle him as carefully as a felucca entering a dangerous strait. At last came the day of his death. That sceptical, brilliant creature, whose understanding

alone survived the most horrible of all forms of decay, found himself between a physician and a confessor, his two antipathies. But he was jovial with them. Was there not a light shining for him behind the veil of the future? Upon that veil, made of lead for other people, but transparent for him, the lightsome, ravishing joys of youth frisked about like ghosts.

It was a lovely summer evening when Don Juan became conscious of the approach of death. The Spanish sky was wonderfully clear, the orange-trees filled the air with perfume, the stars shone with a bright, white light, nature seemed to offer him absolute pledges of his resurrection, a pious and obedient son stood gazing at him with love and respect. About eleven o'clock, he requested to be left alone with that innocent creature.

"Philippe," he said to him in such a kind, affectionate voice that the young man started and wept with pleasure; never had that inflexible father uttered the word *Philippe* in such a tone. "Listen to me, my son," continued the moribund. "I am a great sinner. That is why I have thought constantly of death throughout my life. Long ago I was a friend of the great Pope Julius II. That illustrious pontiff feared that the excessive irritation of my passions might lead me to commit some mortal sin between the moment of my death and the administering of the consecrated oils: he gave me a phial containing some of the holy water that gushed from the rocks in the desert. I have kept the secret of that encroachment

upon the treasure of the Church, but I am authorized to disclose it to my son *in articulo mortis*. You will find the phial in the drawer of this Gothic table which has always stood beside my pillow. The priceless vessel may be of service to you also, my beloved Philippe. Swear to me, by your everlasting salvation, that you will faithfully execute my orders."

Philippe looked at his father. Don Juan was too keen a judge of the expression of human sentiments upon the features not to be able to die in peace on the faith of such a look, even as his father had died in despair on the faith of his.

"You deserved a better father," continued Don Juan. "I venture to confess, my child, that at the moment when the excellent abbé of San-Lucar administered the viaticum to me, I was thinking of the incompatibility of two powers so extensive as those of God and the devil."

"Oh! father!"

"And I said to myself that, when Satan makes his peace, he ought, under pain of being considered a miserable wretch, to stipulate for the pardon of his adherents. That thought haunts me. So I should go to hell, my son, if you should not fulfil my desires."

"Oh! father, tell me them quickly!"

"As soon as I have closed my eyes," rejoined Don Juan, "after two or three minutes, perhaps, you will take my body, while it is still warm, and lay it on a table in the centre of this room. Then

you will extinguish the lamp; the light of the stars will be sufficient for you. You will remove my clothes; and while you recite *Paters* and *Aves*, thus lifting up your soul to God, you will carefully anoint with that holy water my eyes, my lips, and my whole head first, then the body and the limbs in succession; but God's power is so great, my son, that you must not be astonished at anything you may see!"

With that, Don Juan, feeling that death was at hand, added, in an awful voice:

"Hold fast the phial!"

Then he quietly breathed his last in the arms of his son, whose tears flowed abundantly upon his livid, sneering face.

It was about midnight when Don Philippe Belvidero placed his father's body on the table. Having kissed the scowling brow and the gray hair, he extinguished the lamp. The soft light of the moon, whose fantastic reflections illumined the fields, enabled the pious Philippe to see his father's body indistinctly, like a white form amid the shadows. The young man soaked a cloth in the liquid, and faithfully anointed that sacred head, praying fervently the while. He heard a mysterious shivering, but attributed it to the breeze playing among the tree-tops. When he had moistened the right arm, he felt the strong embrace of a powerful, youthful arm about his neck: his father's arm! He uttered a heart-rending shriek and dropped the phial, which was broken in a thousand pieces. The liquid evaporated.

The servants of the château hurried to the spot, armed with torches. That shriek had surprised and terrified them as if the last trump had shaken the world to its foundation. In a moment, the room was filled with people. The trembling crowd saw Don Philippe unconscious, but held fast in the grasp of his father's strong arm, which was thrown around his neck. And then—a supernatural thing!—they saw Don Juan's face, as youthful and beautiful as the face of Antinous; a face with sparkling eyes and bright red lips, surrounded by jet-black hair, and moving about in a way that was horrible to contemplate, with no power to move the skeleton to which it belonged.

“Miracle!” cried an old servant.

And all the Spaniards repeated:

“Miracle!”

Too devout to admit the possibility of magic, Donna Elvire sent for the abbé of San-Lucar. When the priest saw the miracle with his own eyes, he determined to make the most of it, like a shrewd man and an abbé who asked nothing better than to add to his income. Declaring at once that Don Juan would infallibly be canonized, he appointed the ceremony of the apotheosis to take place in his convent, which should thenceforth be called, he said, *San-Juan de Lucar*. At those words, the face made a facetious grimace.

The liking of the Spaniards for solemn functions of that sort is so well known that it should not be difficult to conceive the religious enchantments

whereby the abbey of San-Lucar celebrated the translation of the *blessed Don Juan Belvidero* in its church. A few days after that illustrious nobleman's decease, the miracle of his partial resurrection was so widely known within a radius of fifty leagues of San-Lucar that it was like a comedy to see the sightseers on the roads; they came from all directions, attracted by a *Te Deum* sung by torchlight. The ancient mosque of the convent of San-Lucar, a marvellous edifice built by the Moors, whose arches had heard for three centuries past the name of Jesus Christ substituted for that of Allah, was too small to contain the multitude assembled to witness the ceremony. Crowded together like ants, hidalgos in velvet cloaks and armed with their good swords, stood around the pillars, unable to find room to bend their knees, which bent nowhere else. Lovely peasant-women, whose *basquines* outlined voluptuous forms, supported white-haired old men. Young men with eyes that flashed fire found themselves beside bedizened old women. Then there were couples trembling with joy, inquisitive fiancées escorted by their swains; bridegrooms a day old; children timidly holding one another by the hand. That vast multitude, gay with bright colors, brilliant with contrasts, bedecked with flowers and jewels, made a not unpleasant uproar in the silence of the night. The great doors of the church were thrown open. Those who had arrived too late and were obliged to remain outside, saw from afar, through the three open portals, a scene of which the airy scenery of our modern

operas would afford but a feeble conception. Zealots and sinners, eager to earn the good graces of a new saint, lighted in his honor in that vast church myriads of tapers, a selfish illumination which imparted a magically beautiful aspect to the edifice. The dark arches, the pillars and their capitals, the deep chapels gleaming with gold and silver, the galleries, the Saracenic ornamentation, the most delicate features of that delicate carving, stood clearly forth in that flood of light, like the fanciful figures that form in a red-hot brazier. It was an ocean of gleaming lights, dominated by the gilded choir at the rear of the church, where rose the main altar, whose splendor rivalled that of the rising sun. But the splendor of golden lamps, of silver candelabra, of banners, tassels, saints, and *ex-votos*, paled before the shrine on which Don Juan lay. The scoffer's body gleamed with jewels, flowers, crystals, diamonds, gold, and plumes as white as a seraph's wings, and took the place of a picture of the Christ over the altar. Around it blazed innumerable candles which filled the air with waves of flame. The worthy abbé of San-Lucar, arrayed in his pontifical vestments, armed with his mitre, studded with precious stones, his lawn-sleeves, his golden crucifix, was seated, king of the choir, in an armchair of imperial magnificence, in the midst of all his clergy,—impassive old men with silvery hair, clad in rich albs,—who surrounded him like the saints whom painters represent as grouped around the Almighty. The precentor and the dignitaries of the Chapter, decorated with the gorgeous

insignia of their ecclesiastical vanities, went and came in the clouds formed by the incense, like stars gliding through the firmament. When the triumphal hour was at hand, the bells woke the echoes of the country-side, and that vast throng breathed upward to God the first outcry of praise with which the *Te Deum* begins. Sublime outcry! There were pure, clear voices, women's voices, blended in ecstasy with the grave, powerful voices of men, thousands of voices united in such a mighty wave of sound, that the organ failed to soar above it, despite the roaring of its pipes. Only the shrill notes of the youthful voices of the choir-boys and the full tones of a few tenors evoked pleasing images, depicted infancy and strength, in that ravishing concert of human voices blended in an outburst of love.

Te Deum laudamus!

From the heart of that cathedral, black with kneeling men and women, the psalm arose like a light that suddenly shines forth in the darkness, and the silence was broken as by a thunderclap. The voices ascended with the clouds of incense which cast a transparent, bluish veil over the fantastic beauties of the architecture. All was splendor, perfume, light, and melody. Just as those strains of love and gratitude were wafted up toward the altar, Don Juan, too courteous not to express his thanks, too clever not to understand raillery, replied by a ghastly laugh and solemnly moved in his shrine. But, as the devil caused him to think of the risk he ran of being taken for an ordinary man, a saint, a Boniface, a Pantaléon,

he interrupted that outpouring of love by a howl with which the thousand voices of hell were blended. Earth blessed, Heaven cursed. The church trembled on its ancient foundations.

"*Te Deum laudamus!*" sang the assemblage.

"Go to all the devils, brute beasts that you are! God! God! *Carajos demonios!* Animals, how tiresome you are with your old man God!"

And a torrent of imprecations poured forth, like a river of burning lava during an eruption of Vesuvius.

"*Deus Sabaoth!—Sabaoth!*" cried the Christians.

"You insult the majesty of hell!" replied Don Juan, gnashing his teeth.

Soon the living arm succeeded in coming from the shrine, and threatened the assemblage with gestures instinct with despair and irony.

"The saint is blessing us!" said the old women, the children, and the betrothed young men, credulous folk.

This explains how we are often led astray in our adorations. The man of superior mind makes sport of those who compliment him, and sometimes compliments those of whom he is really making sport in his heart.

At the moment when the abbé, prostrate before the altar, chanted: *Sancte Johannes, ora pro nobis!* he distinctly heard the words: *O coglione!*

"What is going on up there?" cried the sub-prior, seeing the shrine move.

"The saint is playing the devil," replied the abbé.

Thereupon that living head tore itself violently away from the body which had ceased to live, and fell upon the celebrant's yellow skull.

"Remember Donna Elvire!" cried the head, as it buried its teeth in the abbé's head.

The latter uttered a frightful shriek which disturbed the ceremony. All the priests ran up and surrounded their sovereign.

"Idiot, say that there is a God, will you!" cried the voice, just as the abbé, bitten in the brain, was breathing his last.

Paris, October 1830.

SERAPHITA

*TO MADAME EVELINE DE HANSKA, NÉE COMTESSE
RZEWUSKA*

This, madame, is the work that you asked at my hands: I am happy, in dedicating it to you, to be able to bear witness to the respectful affection which you have deigned to allow me to entertain for you. If I am accused of failure after trying to evolve from the profundities of mysticism this book which, in addition to the transparency of our beautiful language, demanded the luminous poesy of the Orient, yours be the blame! Did not you bid me undertake this task, comparable to that of Jacob, saying to me that even the most imperfect sketch of the figure of which you had dreamed from childhood, as I myself had done, would be a thing of some value to you? So here it is, that thing of some value. Why may not this work belong exclusively to those noble minds which, like yours, have been preserved from worldly trivialities by solitude? such minds would be able to supply the melodious measure which it lacks, and which would have made of it, in the hands of one of our poets, the glorious epic which France is still awaiting; but those same minds will accept it from me like one of those balustrades carved by some artist overflowing with faith, whereon pilgrims lean

to meditate upon the end of man, as they gaze upon the choir of a beautiful church.

I am, madame, with respect, your devoted servant

DE BALZAC.

Paris, 23d August, 1835.

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E. T. S. 1898

AT THE FOOT OF THE FALBERG

On a certain morning when the sun was shining brightly upon the landscape we have described, kindling the flames of all the spherical diamonds produced by the crystallization of the snow and ice, two persons passed across the fjord, here along the base of the Falberg, and soared toward its summit from bastion to bastion.

AT THE FOOT OF THE FALBERG

On a certain morning when the sun was shining brightly upon the landscape we have described, kindling the flames of all the ephemeral diamonds produced by the crystallization of the snow and ice, two persons passed across the fiord, flew along the base of the Falberg, and soared toward its summit from bastion to bastion.

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AT THE FOOT OF THE FALBERG

On a certain morning when the sun was shining brightly upon the landscape we have described, kindling the flames of all the spheroidal diamonds produced by the crystallization of the snow and ice, two persons passed across the ford, here along the base of the Falberg, and soared toward its summit from bastion to bastion.

of the low mountains, and the snow-capped peaks of Nunavut, the very name of which greet the traveler, their sublime beauty remained unexplored, and will be found to

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I

SERAPHITUS

As one looks at the coast-line of Norway upon a map, how can one's imagination fail to be moved to wonder by its fantastic indentations, a long stretch of granite lacework upon which the waves of the North Sea roar incessantly? who has not dreamed of the majestic spectacles presented by those beachless shores, by that multitude of creeks and little bays and fiords, of which not one is like the others, and which are all trackless abysses? Would not one say that nature had taken delight in stamping in ineffaceable hieroglyphs the symbol of Norwegian life, by giving to that coast the shape of an immense fish-bone? for fishing is the principal industry of the country, and furnishes almost the entire food-supply of the few men who cling like lichens to those barren cliffs. On a territory covering fourteen degrees of latitude, there are hardly seven hundred thousand souls. Thanks to the perils unattended by glory, to the everlasting snows with which the mountain peaks of Norway—the very name causes a shiver—greet the traveller, their sublime beauties have remained unexplored, and will be found to harmonize

perfectly with the human phenomena, likewise unexplored, at least so far as their poetic side is concerned, which have taken place there, and of which this is the story.

When one of these little bays, a mere cleft in the rock in the eyes of the eider-duck, is so wide that the water does not freeze solid in the prison of stone in which it struggles, the people of the country call it a *fiord*, a word which almost all geographers have tried to naturalize in their respective languages. Despite the generic resemblance of these quasi-canals, each has its own special physiognomy: in all of them the sea has found its way into every fissure, but everywhere the rocks are cleft in a different way, and their volcanic precipices defy the most fanciful geometrical terms: here, the granite is toothed like a saw; there, its surface is too steep to allow the snow to rest upon it, or the Northern firs with their graceful plumes to find a foothold; farther on, the upheaval of the soil has hollowed out some dainty, lovely valley adorned by tier above tier of trees with dark foliage. You would be tempted to call that country the Switzerland of the sea. Between Drontheim and Christiania there is one of these indentations called the Stromfiord. If the Stromfiord is not the loveliest spot in all that lovely region, it has, at all events, the merit of combining all the terrestrial splendors of Norway, and of having served as the scene of a truly celestial story.

The general shape of the Stromfiord, at first sight, is that of a funnel in which a breach has been made

by the sea. The passage which the waves have opened presents to the eye the image of a struggle between the ocean and the granite, two equally potent creations: one by its inertia, the other by its mobility. By way of proofs, a number of reefs of fantastic formation forbid ships to enter. In some places, the fearless children of Norway can leap from side to side, unawed by an abyss a hundred fathoms deep and only six feet wide. Sometimes a frail and unsteady bit of gneiss has fallen across the abyss and joins the two cliffs. Sometimes hunters or fishermen have thrown firs across, in guise of bridges, to join two perpendicular quays, at whose bases the sea roars incessantly. The dangerous, narrow entrance to the fiord turns to the right with a snakelike twist, encounters a mountain which rises to a height of eighteen hundred feet above the sea-level, its base forming a vertical shelf half a league in length, whose unyielding granite does not begin to crumble, to split, or to recede until it reaches a point about two hundred feet above the water. So that the sea, rushing violently in, is dashed back with equal violence, by the *vis inertiae* of the mountain, against the opposite shore, to which the fierce blows of the waves have imparted graceful curves. At the head of the fiord is a mass of gneiss crowned with forests, from which a river falls in cascades, becoming a rushing torrent when the snow melts in the spring, when it forms a sheet of water of vast extent, and roars down into the fiord, vomiting forth aged firs and larches, which can hardly be distinguished amid

the foam. Hurlled violently into the deep waters of the gulf, these trees soon reappear on the surface, become entangled there and form little islands, which float ashore on the left bank, where the people of the little village on the Stromfiord find them, broken and torn, sometimes with their trunks entire, but always stripped of bark and branches. The mountain which receives the assaults of the sea against its base in the Stromfiord, and the assaults of the north wind upon its summit, is called the Falberg.

Its peak, always enveloped in a cloak of snow and ice, is the steepest in Norway, where the proximity of the pole causes, at an altitude of eighteen hundred feet, a cold equal to that which reigns on the loftiest mountains of the globe. The side of the mountain toward the sea is an almost perpendicular cliff, but inclines gradually toward the east, and is connected with the falls of the Sieg by a series of valleys at different elevations, where the cold allows nothing to grow save furze-bushes and stunted trees. That part of the fiord into which the stream empties at the feet of the forest is called Siegdalhen, a word which may be translated "the slope of the Sieg," that being the name of the river. The curve opposite the sheer precipice of the Falberg is the valley of Jarvis, a lovely spot overlooked by hills covered with firs, larches, birches, and a few oaks and beeches, the richest and most brightly colored of all the decorations that northern nature has bestowed upon those rugged cliffs. The eye can readily distinguish the line at which the soil, heated

by the sun's rays, begins to allow cultivation and affords sustenance for the various species of Norwegian flora. At that spot, the fiord is so wide that the waves, hurled back by the Falberg, expire with gentle murmuring on the lowest fringe of those hillsides, a shore bordered with fine sand, sown with spangles of mica, with pretty pebbles, with bits of porphyry and marble of innumerable shades, brought from Sweden by the waters of the river, and with drift from the sea, shells and sea-flowers which have been tossed there by the storms, from the pole or from the south.

At the base of the mountains of Jarvis lies the village, consisting of some two hundred wooden houses, whose inhabitants are lost to the world like swarms of wild bees in a forest, which, without increasing or diminishing in numbers, vegetate contentedly, living by plunder in the bosom of nature at its wildest. The unknown existence of that village is easily explained. Few men were bold enough to venture among the reefs at the outlet of the fiord to engage in fishing, an industry in which the Norwegians engage on a grand scale on other less perilous parts of the coast. The fish are numerous enough in the fiord to furnish a large part of the food-supply of the people; the pasture land in the valleys supplies them with milk and butter; then there are some excellent fields in which they are able to raise rye, hemp, and vegetables, which they defend against the extreme cold and against the short-lived but intense heat of their summer with the skill that all

Norwegians display in that twofold contest. The lack of communications, either by land, where the roads are impracticable, or by sea, where none but small boats can thread their way through the maritime defiles of the fiord, prevents them from enriching themselves by finding a market for the wood of their forests. It would require an outlay as enormous to make the fiord navigable as to open a road into the interior. The roads from Christiania to Drontheim give the fiord a wide berth, and cross the Sieg by a bridge several leagues from its mouth; the shore between the valley of Jarvis and Drontheim is covered with vast, impassable forests; and the Falberg is separated from Christiania by inaccessible precipices. The village of Jarvis might, perhaps, have been placed in communication with the interior of Norway and with Sweden by way of the Sieg; but, to be brought in touch with civilization, the Stromfiord required a man of genius. That man of genius did, in fact, make his appearance; he was a poet, a Swedish monk, who died admiring and venerating the beauties of the country as one of the most magnificent of the Creator's works.

Now, those men whom study has endowed with that inward sight whose rapid perception brings in succession before their minds, as upon a canvas, the most strongly contrasted landscapes of the earth, will readily form an idea of the general appearance of the Stromfiord. They, and they alone, perhaps, will be able to sail, in imagination, among the reefs at the tortuous entrance of the bay wherein the sea

roars endlessly; to follow its wild waves along the eternal shelving faces of the Falberg, whose pyramidal white peaks blend with the misty clouds in a sky that is almost always of a pearly-gray; to admire the lovely, indented surface of the bay; to listen to the cascades of the Sieg, which falls in long, white threads upon a breastwork of fine trees scattered about in confusion, standing erect or hidden among fragments of gneiss; and then to rest on the joyous pictures presented by the sloping hills of Jarvis, where the vegetable treasures of the North spring from the earth, in families, in myriads: here, birches graceful as maidens and swaying gracefully like them; there, colonnades of beech-trees, with centenary, moss-grown trunks; all the contrasts of the varying shades of green, of white clouds floating among black firs, of vast moors covered with purple heather in an infinite variety of shades—in fine, all the colors, all the perfumes, of that flora whose marvels are unknown to the world. Magnify the proportions of that amphitheatre, soar among the clouds, lose yourself in the clefts of the cliffs where the sea-dogs seek repose, your imagination will never rise to the magnificence or the poesy of that corner of Norway! Could your imagination ever be as great as the ocean that confines it, as capricious as the fanciful figures outlined by those forests, those clouds, those shadows, and by the rapid variations of the light?

Do you see, above the fields by the shore, on the upper margin of the tillage land that extends in a

wavy line along the base of the high hills of Jarvis, two or three hundred houses covered with *næver*, a roofing material made of birch-bark, frail, low houses, which resemble silk-worms on a mulberry-leaf, blown there by the wind? Above those humble, peaceful dwellings is a church, built with a simplicity that harmonizes with the poverty of the village. A cemetery surrounds the apse of the church, and a little farther on is the rectory. Still higher up, on a hump of the mountain, stands a house, the only one in the village built of stone, and, for that reason, called by the natives the "Swedish château." In truth, some thirty years before this story opens, a rich man came from Sweden to Jarvis and settled there, exerting himself to improve the fortunes of the village. That little house, built with the design of inducing the natives to build similar ones for themselves, was remarkable by reason of the solidity of its construction, and by reason of the wall that enclosed it,—a rare thing in Norway, where, notwithstanding the great abundance of stone, wood is used for all fences, even for those about the fields. The house, thus protected from the snow, stood on raised ground in the centre of a vast courtyard. The windows were sheltered by penthouses projecting to a great distance and supported by great squared firs, which impart a sort of patriarchal appearance to the structures of the northern countries. From beneath those sheltering projections one could readily distinguish the wild nakedness of the Falberg, compare the infinite

expanse of the open sea to the mere drop of water in the foaming gulf, listen to the ceaseless flowing of the Sieg, whose surface seemed motionless at a distance as it fell into its granite bowl, bounded for three leagues around by the glaciers of the North ; in a word, one could see the whole region in which the supernatural events of this narrative are to take place.

The winter of 1799 and 1800 was one of the roughest within the memory of Europeans; the sea about Norway rushed bodily into the fiords, where the violence of the surf ordinarily prevents it from freezing. A terrific wind, the effects of which resembled those of the Spanish *levanter*, swept the ice from the Stromfiord and blew all the snow to the head of the inlet. Not for many years had the people of Jarvis been permitted to see, in winter, the colors of the sky reflected in the vast mirror of the water, a curious spectacle in the bosom of those mountains whose inequalities were all buried beneath the successive layers of snow, the sharpest peaks as well as the deepest valleys forming slight folds merely in the vast robe cast by nature over that landscape, at that time melancholy beyond words in its glaring monotony. The long falling sheets of the Sieg, being suddenly frozen, described an enormous arch beneath which the natives might have passed out of reach of the hurricanes, had any of them been bold enough to venture abroad. But the dangers of travelling, even the shortest distances, kept the most fearless hunters at home, for they

feared that on account of the snow they might not be able to recognize the paths cut along the edges of precipices and crevasses and on the mountain sides. So it was that no living thing gave animation to that desert of white, where the north wind from the pole reigned supreme, its voice alone being audible there at rare intervals. The sky, almost always of a grayish hue, caused the water to assume the tints of burnished steel. Perchance an old eider-duck, now and then, flew unharmed through the boundless expanse of sky, protected by the warm down about which hover the dreams of the wealthy, who have no knowledge of the dangers which are the price of those feathers; but, like the Bedouin who alone ploughs the trackless sands of Africa, the bird was neither seen nor heard; the benumbed atmosphere, deprived of its magnetic currents, echoed neither the flapping of its wings nor its cheery cries. Indeed, no eye of sufficient keenness could have endured the glare of that precipice covered with dazzling crystals, and the pitiless reflection of the snow, barely softened on the summit by the rays of a pallid sun, which appeared now and again as if desirous to demonstrate the fact that it still lived. Often, when heaps of gray clouds, driven in squadrons among the mountain peaks and the firs, concealed the sky beneath a threefold curtain, the earth, in default of light from heaven, furnished light for itself. So it was that in that spot were to be seen all the majestic features of the cold that forever encompasses the pole, its leading characteristic

being the royal silence in which absolute monarchs live. Every principle carried to extremes bears within itself the appearance of a negation and the symptoms of death: is not life a contest between two forces? In that spot there was nothing to indicate life. A single power, the unproductive strength of the ice, reigned unopposed. The roaring of the open sea in its passion did not reach that silent basin, where there is so much uproar during the three short months when nature makes all haste to produce the scanty crops necessary for the support of that patient people. A few tall firs reared aloft their black pyramids laden with snowy garlands, and the shape of their hanging branches, with their drooping needles, completed the mourning aspect of those mountain tops, where they assumed in the distance the appearance of brown specks.

Every family remained by its own fireside, in a house carefully closed, supplied with biscuit, preserved butter, and dried fish, provisions laid in beforehand for the seven winter months. One could hardly see the smoke from those dwellings. Almost all of them were buried under the snow, but protected against injury from its weight by long boards running from the roof to posts set solidly in the earth at a considerable distance and forming a covered road around the house. During such terrible winters, the women weave and dye the cotton or woollen stuffs of which their clothes are made, while most of the men read, or abandon themselves to those absorbing reflections which have given birth to the

profound theories, the mystic dreams of the North, its beliefs, its exhaustive studies concerning an abstruse point in science, which they investigate as if with a probe; a semi-monastic mode of life which compels the mind to fall back upon itself, to find its sustenance within itself, and which makes of the Norwegian peasant a being apart among the people of Europe. Such, then, was the condition of the Stromfiord in the first year of the nineteenth century, about the middle of the month of May.

On a certain morning when the sun was shining brightly upon the landscape we have described, kindling the flames of all the ephemeral diamonds produced by the crystallization of the snow and ice, two persons passed across the fiord, flew along the base of the Falberg, and soared toward its summit from bastion to bastion. Were they two human beings or two arrows? One who had seen them rising, frieze above frieze, would have taken them for two eider-ducks sailing in company through the clouds. Neither the most superstitious fisherman nor the most daring huntsman would have attributed to human creatures the power to retain their footing along the faint lines marked upon the granite where those two glided along none the less with the uncanny surefootedness possessed by somnambulists when, forgetting all the risks attendant upon their weight and the dangers of the slightest deviation from the true course, they run along the edges of roofs, maintaining their equilibrium by virtue of some unknown power.

“Stop, Seraphitus,” said one of the two, a pale

young girl, "and let me breathe. I have looked only at you as we climbed the walls of this abyss; otherwise, what would have become of me? But then, I am only a poor, weak creature. Do I tire you?"

"No," said he, upon whose arm she was leaning. "Forward, Minna! the place where we now are is not secure enough for us to stay here."

Again they both made the long pieces of board fastened to their feet whistle over the snow, and reached the first shelf which chance had clearly marked upon the side of the abyss. The person whom Minna called Seraphitus supported himself upon his right heel to raise the board, which was about six feet long, narrow as a child's foot, and was made fast to his shoe by two thongs made of the skin of a sea-dog. The board was about two inches thick and faced with reindeer skin, the hair of which, standing erect in the snow, brought Seraphitus abruptly to a standstill; he drew up his left foot, to which was attached a similar patten not less than twelve feet long, turned hastily around, seized his timid companion, lifted her in his arms notwithstanding the long pattens with which her feet were shod, and seated her on a block of granite after brushing the snow away with his cloak.

"You are safe here, Minna, you can tremble at your ease."

"We have already climbed a third of the way up the Ice-Cap," she said, glancing up at the peak to which she gave the popular name by which it is known in Norway. "I cannot believe it."

But she was too much out of breath to say more, so she smiled at Seraphitus, who placed his hand upon her heart without replying, and held her so, listening to its resonant palpitations, which were as hurried as those of a young bird taken by surprise.

"It often beats as quickly when I have not been running," she said.

Seraphitus bowed, with no sign of disdain or indifference. Despite the grace which made that movement of his head almost courtly, it nevertheless betrayed a dissent which, in a woman, would have been bewitchingly coquettish. Seraphitus pressed the maiden warmly to his heart. Minna took the caress for a reply, and continued to gaze at him. As Seraphitus raised his head, tossing back from his forehead the golden masses of his hair with an almost impatient gesture, so as to expose his brow, he read happiness in his companion's eyes.

"Yes, Minna," he said, in a voice whose paternal accent had a fascinating sound in the mouth of one still in his teens, "look at me, do not look down."

"Why not?"

"Do you want to know? Try it."

Minna cast a hasty glance at her feet, and uttered a sudden shriek, like a child who has fallen in with a tiger. The horrible sensation of dizziness had seized her, that single glance had sufficed to communicate the contagion to her. The fiord, jealous of encroachments upon its domain, roared aloud in a voice that confused her, ringing in her ears, as if to devour her more surely by interposing between her

and life. Thereupon a shiver crept down her back from her hair to her feet, icy cold at first, but it soon poured into her nerves an insufferable heat, beat violently in her veins, and tortured all her extremities with electric shocks like those caused by touching the electric eel. Too weak to resist, she felt herself irresistibly drawn by an unknown force down from the shelf on which they stood, where she fancied that she saw some monster darting venom at her, a monster whose magnetic eyes fascinated her, whose open jaws seemed to be crunching his prey in anticipation.

"I die, my Seraphitus, having never loved anyone but you," she said, mechanically making a movement as if to jump.

Seraphitus breathed softly on her forehead and her eyes. Suddenly, like the traveller refreshed by a bath, Minna found that only the memory remained of her poignant suffering, already banished by that caressing breath which permeated her body and inundated her with balsamic emanations, as swiftly as the breath had passed through the air.

"Who, then, are you?" she said, with a feeling of delicious terror. "But I know, you are my life.—How can you look into that abyss without dying?" she continued, after a pause.

Seraphitus left her clinging to the granite, and went and took up his position, as a ghost might have done, on the very edge of the shelf, whence his eyes gazed down into the fiord, defying its dazzling depth; his body did not tremble, his brow

remained as white and impassive as that of a marble statue: abyss against abyss!

"Seraphitus, if you love me, come back!" cried the girl. "Your danger renews my torture.—Who are you, pray, that you have such superhuman power at your age?" she asked him, when she felt his arms about her once more.

"Why," he replied, "you look without fear upon spaces far more vast."

And this strange being pointed with his raised finger to the halo of blue sky left by the clouds above their heads, in which the stars could be seen in broad day by virtue of an atmospheric law not yet explained.

"But what a difference!" she said, with a smile.

"You are right," he replied; "we were born to bend our steps heavenward. One's native country, like a mother's face, never frightens a child."

His voice stirred the very entrails of his companion, who had become silent.

"Well, let us go on," he added.

They flitted together along the faintly-marked paths on the mountain-side, from terrace to terrace, from line to line, with the rapidity of the Arabian horse, that bird of the desert. In a few moments, they reached a carpet of grass and mosses and flowers, whereon no human creature had ever rested.

"What a lovely *sæler*!" exclaimed Minna, calling the mead by its true name; "but how happens it to be at this height?"

"We are above the line of the Norwegian flora, it

is true," said Seraphitus; "but the presence of these few blades of grass and flowers is due to this cliff which shelters them from the polar cold.—Put this flower in your bosom, Minna," he added, plucking a flower; "take this fragrant, unique flower that no human eye has ever beheld, and keep it as a souvenir of this morning, unique in your life! Never again will you find a guide to lead you to this *sæler*."

As he spoke, he suddenly handed her a hybrid plant which his eagle eye had shown him among the stalkless silenes and the saxifrages, a veritable marvel of beauty blossoming under the breath of angels. With childish eagerness, Minna seized the plant, in color a transparent green as brilliant as the green of the emerald, consisting of small green leaves rolled together in the shape of a horn, light brown in the centre, but changing gradually to green toward the edges, which were serrated with teeth of marvellous delicacy of outline. The leaves were so close together that they seemed to blend with one another, and produced a multitude of pretty rose-shaped effects. Here and there, upon that carpet, rose white stars bordered with a thread of gold, with purple stamens but no pistils protruding from their bosoms. A perfume, suggestive at once of that of the rose and the orange-blossom, but fleeting and wild, gave the final touch to the indefinably celestial quality of that mysterious flower, which Seraphitus contemplated with a sort of melancholy, as if its odor expressed to him plaintive thoughts which he alone understood. But to Minna that

extraordinary phenomenon seemed to be a mere caprice whereby nature had amused herself by endowing stones with the freshness, the beauty, and the fragrance of plants.

“Why should it be unique? Will it never be repeated?” the girl asked Seraphitus, who blushed, and abruptly changed the subject.

“Let us sit down; turn around and look! Perhaps you will not tremble at this height? The abyss is so deep now that you can no longer distinguish its depth, it has acquired the smooth aspect of the sea, the indistinctness of the clouds, the color of the sky; the ice in the fiord is a lovely turquoise shade; the forests of firs are mere faint dark-brown lines; for us, all abysses should be thus adorned.”

Seraphitus uttered these words with the impressiveness of tone and gesture known only to those who have climbed to the summit of the loftiest mountains on the globe; a manner contracted so instinctively that the haughtiest traveller finds himself compelled to treat his guide as a brother, and does not deem himself his superior until they descend again into the valleys where men dwell. He knelt at Minna's feet and removed her snow-shoes. The child was not conscious of it, so lost in wonder was she at the imposing spectacle presented by the Norwegian landscape, the high cliffs being visible from base to summit at a single glance: so deeply moved was she by the solemn permanence of those ice-bound peaks, which mere words were powerless to describe.

"We did not come here by the aid of human strength alone," she said, clasping her hands; "surely I am dreaming."

"You call those facts supernatural of which the causes elude you," he replied.

"Your answers," she rejoined, "are always stamped with an indefinable depth of meaning. Beside you, I understand everything without an effort. Ah! I am free."

"You no longer have your snow-shoes on, that is all."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "when I would have loved to unfasten yours and kiss your feet!"

"Keep such words for Wilfrid," rejoined Seraphitus, gently.

"Wilfrid!" Minna repeated, in an outburst of wrath, which subsided as soon as she had glanced at her companion.—"You never lose your temper!" she said, trying, but in vain, to take his hand; "you are despairingly perfect in every respect."

"And from that you conclude that I am without feeling?"

Minna was terrified at that keen glance flashed into her mind.

"You make it clear to me that we understand each other," she replied, with the fascinating grace of the woman who loves.

Seraphitus shook his head slowly as he glanced at her with an expression at once sad and sweet.

"Do you who know everything," continued Minna, "tell me why the shyness that I felt with

you down yonder has vanished since we came up here; why do I now dare, for the first time, to look you in the face, whereas, down in the valley, I hardly dared to steal a glance at you?"

"Here, perhaps, we have laid aside the trivial things of earth," he replied, removing his cloak.

"You were never so handsome," said Minna, seating herself upon a moss-covered rock, and losing herself in contemplation of the being who had guided her over a part of the mountain which at a distance seemed inaccessible.

Never, in very truth, had Seraphitus shone with such dazzling brilliancy; no other expression would do justice to the animation of his features and the general aspect of his person. Was that splendor due to the lustre imparted to the complexion by the pure air of the mountains and the reflection of the snow? was it produced by the internal commotion which overexcites the body when it is resting after long-continued agitation? was it attributable to the sharp contrast between the golden radiance cast by the sun and the darkness of the clouds through which the lovely couple had passed? Perhaps we should add to those causes the effects of one of the most beautiful phenomena which human nature has it in its power to offer. If some skilful physiologist had examined that creature, who seemed at that moment, judging by the pride depicted upon his brow and the gleam that shot from his eyes, a young man of some seventeen years; if he had sought the active principle of that vigorous life beneath

the fairest skin that ever the North bestowed upon one of its children, he would undoubtedly have become convinced of the existence of a phosphorescent fluid in nerves which seemed to shine beneath the epidermis, or of the constant burning of an inward light which illumined Seraphitus as an alabaster lamp is illumined by the light within it. Although his hands, from which he had removed the gloves in order to unfasten Minna's snow-shoes, were slender and tapering, they seemed to possess strength equal to that which the Creator has bestowed on the transparent claws of the crab. The golden flames that flashed from his eyes contended for supremacy with the rays of the sun, and he seemed not to receive light from it, but to give it light. His body, slender and fragile as a woman's, denoted one of those natures apparently feeble, whose power is always on a level with their desires, and who are always strong at the right moment.

Seraphitus was of medium height, but seemed to grow taller when he turned his face to you, as if he were about to soar aloft. His hair, curled by a fairy's hand, and seemingly ruffled by a breath of wind, added to the illusion produced by his ethereal bearing; but that bearing, entirely free from effort, resulted from a mental phenomenon rather than from a physical habit. Minna's imagination was accessory to that constant hallucination, to which anyone would have fallen a victim, and which gave to Seraphitus the appearance of the faces we see in a pleasant dream. No known type

could convey an adequate impression of that face, so majestically virile in Minna's eyes, but, in the eyes of a man, capable of eclipsing by its feminine charm the loveliest faces that we owe to Raphael's brush. That divine painter constantly portrayed a sort of placid joy, an amorous sweetness in the lines of his angelic beauties; but was ever imagination so rich that, without looking upon Seraphitus himself, it could portray the melancholy blended with hope which half concealed the ineffable sentiments stamped upon his features? Who could conceive, even in an artistic rhapsody, when everything is possible, the shadows cast by a mysterious awe upon that too intelligent brow which seemed to question the skies and always to have pity on the earth? That head soared disdainfully aloft, like a sublime bird of prey whose cries rend the air, and yet was as resigned as the turtle-dove whose voice pours forth its song of affection in the heart of the silent forest. Seraphitus's complexion was unusually light, and its fairness was heightened by red lips, dark-brown eyebrows and silky lashes, the only details that marred the pallor of a face whose perfect regularity of feature interfered in no wise with the vivid expression of the feelings; they were reflected therein without strain or violence, but with the natural and majestic gravity which we love to attribute to beings of a superior type. Everything in that marble-like face expressed strength and repose.

Minna rose to take Seraphitus's hand, hoping that she might in that way draw him toward her and lay

upon that fascinating brow a kiss extorted by admiration rather than by love; but a glance from the young man, a glance that penetrated her very being as a sunbeam penetrates the prism, froze the poor girl's blood. She was conscious, but without understanding it, of a gulf between them, she turned her face away and wept. Suddenly a powerful hand grasped her waist, and a voice, overflowing with melody, said to her:

“Come!”

She obeyed, and placed her face, suddenly reanimated, against the young man's heart; and he, adapting his step to hers, with sweet courtesy, led her to a spot from which they could see the gorgeous decorations of the polar landscape.

“Before I look at you and listen to you, Seraphitus, tell me why you repulse me? Have I displeased you? tell me how. I would like to have nothing of my own; I would that all my earthly riches were yours as the riches of my heart are yours; that the light came to me only through your eyes, as my thoughts are derived from your thoughts; then I should no longer fear to offend you by sending back to you the reflections of your mind, the words of your heart, the light of your light, as we send back to God the reflections with which He feeds our minds. I would like to be all you!”

“Ah, well, Minna, a constant desire is a promise made us by the future. Hope on! But if you wish to be pure, always mingle the thought of the Omnipotent with your earthly affections, then you will

love all His creatures, and your heart will attain a great height!"

"I will do whatever you wish," she replied, raising her eyes timidly to his face.

"I cannot be your companion," said Seraphitus, sadly.

He forced back certain thoughts that came to his lips, and held out his arms toward Christiania, which was visible, a mere speck on the horizon.

"Look!" said he.

"We are very small," she replied.

"True, but we become great by sentiment and intelligence," replied Seraphitus. "With us alone, Minna, begins the knowledge of things; the little that we learn of the laws of the visible world enables us to discover the vastness of the worlds above. I know not if there is still time to speak thus to you; but I would be so glad to communicate to you the flame of my hopes! Perhaps we shall be together some day in the world where love does not die."

"Why not now and forever?" she murmured.

"Nothing is stable here," he scornfully replied. "The ephemeral bliss of earthly loves is a ray of light which indicates to some minds the dawn of more lasting bliss, just as the discovery of a natural law leads some richly endowed minds to infer the existence of a whole system of similar laws. Is not our fragile earthly happiness, then, the proof of another perfect happiness, just as the earth, a fragment of the world, is a proof of the existence of the world? We cannot measure the vast orbit of the

divine thought, of which we are but an atom, as infinitesimal as God is great, but we can foresee its immensity, and kneel and worship and wait. Men always go astray in their scientific investigations because they do not see that everything on this globe of theirs is relative and implies a general revolution, a constant production which necessarily brings with it progress toward an end. Man himself is not a complete creation; otherwise God would not exist!"

"How have you found time to learn so many things?" the girl asked him.

"I remember," was his reply.

"In my eyes, you are more beautiful than everything else that I see."

"We are among the greatest of God's works. Has He not given us the power to meditate concerning nature, to concentrate it in ourselves by the thought, and to make of it a stepping-stone to rise nearer to Him? We love one another in proportion as our minds contain more or less of Heaven. But do not be unjust, Minna; look at the spectacle spread out at your feet, is it not grand? At your feet the ocean stretches away like a carpet, the mountains are like the walls of a circus, the ether above us is like the rounded curtain of this great theatre, and here we inhale the thought of God like a sweet perfume. Look! the storms that shatter vessels laden with men seem to us here but gentle breezes, and if you raise your head and look above us, all is blue. See yonder diadem of stars. Here the varying shades of terrestrial expression disappear. Gazing

upon this landscape, softened by distance, do you not feel within yourself more profundity of thought than wit? have you not more solemnity than enthusiasm? more energy than will? are you not conscious of sensations which we have no power to interpret? Do you not feel that you have wings? Let us pray."

Seraphitus bent his knee, and crossed his hands on his breast, while Minna fell upon her knees weeping. They remained thus for some moments, during which the blue halo in the sky above their heads grew larger, and beams of light enveloped them without their knowledge.

"Why do not you weep when I weep?" said Minna in a broken voice.

"They who are all spirit do not weep," replied Seraphitus, rising. "Why should I weep? I no longer see the misery of mankind. Here, the good shines forth in all its majesty; below, I hear the supplications and the agonizing cries of the harp of sorrows, vibrating under the fingers of the captive spirit. Here, I listen to the concert of the heavenly harps. Below, you have hope, that noble commencement of faith; but this is the kingdom of faith, which is hope realized!"

"You would never love me, I am too imperfect, you despise me," said the girl.

"Minna, the violet that lies hidden at the foot of the oak says to itself: 'The sun loves me not, it comes not to me.' The sun says to itself: 'Should I shine upon that poor flower, it would perish!'

Being fond of the flower, it filters its rays through the leaves of the oak, and so weakens them in order to color the petals of its beloved. It seems to me that I do not wear veils enough, and I fear lest you see me too clearly: you would shudder if you knew me better. Listen: I have no taste for the fruits of the earth; I have learned to know too well the pleasures you enjoy; and, like the dissolute emperors of profane Rome, I have reached the point where everything is distasteful to me, for I have acquired the gift of second-sight. Give me up," said Seraphitus, sorrowfully.

He went and took his seat upon a block of stone, letting his head fall forward on his breast.

"Why do you drive me to despair thus?" said Minna.

"Begone!" cried Seraphitus. "I have nothing of what you would have of me. Your love is too earthly for me. Why do you not love Wilfrid? Wilfrid is a man, a man tried by passions, who will know how to embrace you with his nervous arms, who will make you feel the pressure of a broad, strong hand. He has fine, black hair, eyes overflowing with human thoughts, a heart that pours torrents of lava into the words his lips pronounce. He will crush you with caresses. He will be your well-beloved, your husband. Wilfrid is the man for you!"

Minna wept hot tears.

"Do you dare to say that you love him not?" he asked, in a voice that pierced her heart like a dagger.

“Mercy, mercy, my Seraphitus!”

“Love him, poor child of the earth to which your destiny holds you fast,” said the terrible Seraphitus, seizing Minna with a violence that forced her to go with him to the edge of the *sæler*, from which the view was so boundless that an enthusiastic girl could easily believe herself to be above the world. “I desired a companion to go with me to the kingdom of light, I determined to show you this bit of clay, and I see that you still cling to it. Farewell! Remain here, enjoy through your senses, obey your nature, turn pale with pale men, blush with women, play with the children, pray with the guilty, raise your eyes to Heaven in your sorrow; tremble, hope, palpitate; you will have a companion, you can still laugh and weep, give and receive. But I am a sort of outcast, far from heaven; a sort of monster, far from earth. My heart no longer beats; I live only in myself and for myself. I feel with my mind, I breathe with my brow, I see with my thought, I am dying of impatience and hopeless longings. No one on earth has the power to gratify my desires, to calm my impatience, and I have forgotten how to weep. I am alone. I am resigned, and I wait.”

Seraphitus glanced at the flower-strewn mound on which he had placed Minna, then turned toward the lofty mountains whose summits were veiled with dense clouds, into which he cast the rest of his thoughts.

“Do you not hear a delicious concert, Minna?” he continued, in his turtle-dove’s voice, for the eagle

had cried enough. "Would not one say it was produced by the Æolian harps which your poets place in the heart of forests and mountains? Do you see the indistinct figures in yonder clouds? do you see the winged feet of those who are arranging the decorations of the sky? Those strains refresh the soul; soon the sky will let fall the flowers of spring, a gleam of light has come from the north. Let us fly, it is time."

In a moment, their snow-shoes were reattached and they descended the Falberg by the steep slopes that led down into the valley of the Sieg. A miraculous intelligence guided their course, or, to speak more accurately, their flight. When a snow-covered crevasse came in their way, Seraphitus grasped Minna and darted swiftly, light as a bird, across the fragile layer of snow that bridged the deep chasm. Often, guiding his companion's steps, he made a slight deviation to avoid a precipice, a tree, a rock which he seemed to see under the snow, as seamen familiar with the ocean divine the presence of reefs by the color, the eddies, or the smoothness of the water. When they reached the Siegdalhen path and could go down almost fearlessly in a straight line to the ice in the Stromfiord, Seraphitus stopped Minna.

"Have you nothing more to say to me?" he asked her.

"I thought that you wished to meditate undisturbed," replied the maiden, respectfully.

"Let us hurry, sweet one, the night is at hand," he rejoined.

Minna started when she heard the voice of her guide, for its tone was new to her; pure as a young girl's, it put to flight the fantastic, luminous mist of the dream through which she had thus far marched. Seraphitus began to lay aside his masculine vigor and to banish from his glances their too keen intelligence. Soon those two fascinating creatures glided out upon the fiord and reached the field of snow that lay between the bank and the first row of houses in the village of Jarvis; then, impelled by the approach of darkness, they ascended hastily toward the rectory, as if they were climbing the steps of a vast staircase.

"My father must be anxious," said Minna.

"No," Seraphitus replied.

At that moment, they reached the porch of the humble dwelling where Monsieur Becker, the pastor of Jarvis, sat reading, awaiting his daughter for the evening meal.

"Dear Monsieur Becker," said Seraphitus, "I bring Minna back to you safe and sound."

"Thanks, mademoiselle," replied the old man, laying his spectacles down on the book. "You must be tired."

"Not at all," said Minna, who at that moment felt her companion's breath on her brow.

"Will you come to take tea with me, little one, on the day after to-morrow, in the afternoon?"

"With great pleasure, my dear."

"You will bring her, will you not, Monsieur Becker?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

Seraphitus bowed coquettishly, saluted the old man, departed, and a few moments later arrived in the courtyard of the Swedish château. An octogenarian man-servant appeared under the immense penthouse, holding a lantern. Seraphitus removed his snow-shoes with the graceful dexterity of a woman, hastened to the parlor, threw himself on a great couch covered with furs, and lay there at full length.

“What will you have to eat?” asked the old man, lighting the unconscionably long candles that are used in Norway.

“Nothing, David, I am too tired.”

He removed his cloak lined with marten fur, rolled himself up in it, and fell asleep. The old servant stood for some moments gazing fondly at the singular being who was reposing under his eyes, and whose sex nobody would have found it easy to determine, not even those most knowing in such matters. To see him lying so, wrapped in his customary garment, which resembled a woman’s *peignoir* quite as much as a man’s cloak, it was impossible not to attribute to a young girl the dainty feet which he allowed to hang over the edge of the couch, as if to show with what delicate grace nature had attached them to his legs; but his brow, his profile, would have seemed to denote manly vigor carried to its highest point.

“She is suffering, and will not tell me,” thought the old man; “she is dying like a flower withered by a too fierce sunbeam.”

And the old man wept.

II

SERAPHITA

During the evening, David entered the parlor once more.

"I know whom you have come to announce," said Seraphita, in a sleepy voice. "Wilfrid may come in."

Overhearing the words, a man suddenly appeared and sat down by her side.

"My dear Seraphita, are you ill? You seem paler than usual."

She turned slowly toward him, after pushing her hair back from her forehead like a pretty woman who is so overdone by headache that she no longer has strength to complain.

"I committed the folly of crossing the fiord with Minna; we climbed the Falberg."

"Did you want to kill yourself?" he exclaimed, with the terror of a lover.

"Have no fear, my good Wilfrid, I took the best care of your Minna."

Wilfrid struck the table violently with his hand, rose and walked toward the door, uttering a sorrowful

exclamation, then returned, and tried to express his grievance in words.

“Why this uproar if you think I am ill?” queried Seraphita.

“Forgive me! have mercy on me!” he replied, kneeling beside her. “Speak harshly to me, demand of me whatever is hardest to endure of all that your pitiless woman’s caprice may suggest to you; but, my beloved, do not cast a doubt upon my love. You use Minna for an axe, and rain blows upon me. Mercy!”

“Why say such words to me, my friend, when you know they are of no avail?” she replied, glancing at him with an expression which finally became so soft that Wilfrid no longer saw Seraphita’s eyes, but a sort of liquid light, whose trembling resembled the last echoes of a melody instinct with Italian sweetness.

“Ah! one does not die of suffering,” he said.

“Are you in pain?” she asked, in a voice whose vibrations produced an effect upon his heart similar to that produced by her glance. “What can I do for you?”

“Love me as I love you.”

“Poor Minna!” she replied.

“I never go armed!” cried Wilfrid.

“You are in a vile mood,” said Seraphita, with a smile. “Did I not speak like those Parisian women of whose love-affairs you tell me?”

Wilfrid resumed his seat, folded his arms, and gazed gloomily at Seraphita.

"I forgive you," he said, "for you know not what you do."

"Oh!" she retorted, "ever since the days of Eve, women have always done both good and evil knowingly."

"I believe it," he said.

"I am sure of it, Wilfrid. Our instinct is precisely what makes us so perfect. What you men learn we women instinctively feel."

"Then, why do you not feel how dearly I love you?"

"Because you do not love me."

"Great God!"

"Why do you complain so of your suffering?" she asked.

"You are terrible to-night, Seraphita. You are a veritable demon."

"No, I am simply blessed with the faculty of comprehension, and that is frightful. Grief, Wilfrid, is a light that illumines life for us."

"Why did you climb the Falberg, I pray to know?"

"Minna will tell you. I am too tired to talk. Do you talk, you who know everything, have learned everything, and forgotten nothing, and have passed through so many social tests. Entertain me, I am listening."

"What can I say to you that you do not know? Indeed, your very question is a mockery. You admit nothing that exists in the world, you distort its nomenclature, you trample on its laws, its manners,

its feelings, its learning, reducing them to the proportions that they seem to possess when one views them from outside the globe."

"You see, my friend, that I am not a woman. You are wrong to love me. I descend from the ethereal regions of my pretended power, I make myself humbly small, I bow my head after the manner of the poor females of every species, and lo! you at once exalt me again! In a word, I am broken in pieces, shattered, I appeal to you for help, I need your arm, and you repulse me; we do not understand each other."

"You are more wicked to-night than I have ever seen you."

"Wicked!" she repeated, flashing a glance at him by which all his sentiments were blended in a divine sensation. "No, I am not well; that is all. So leave me, my friend. Are you not abusing your rights as a man? It is our duty always to please you, to enliven you, to be always gay, and to have no other whims than those that amuse you. What shall I do, my friend? Do you expect me to sing or to dance, when fatigue deprives me of the use of voice and legs? Though we be at our last gasp, my masters, we must still smile upon you! You call that reigning, I believe. The poor women! I pity them. Tell me, have they neither heart nor mind, that you abandon them when they grow old? Very well, Wilfrid, I am more than a hundred years old, so begone! go to Minna's feet."

"Oh! my eternal love!"

“Do you know what eternity is? Hush, Wilfrid. You desire me, but you do not love me. Tell me, do I not remind you of some flirt?”

“Oh! it is true that I no longer recognize in you the pure young girl whom I saw for the first time in Jarvis church.”

At those words, Seraphita passed her hands across her forehead, and when she uncovered her face, Wilfrid was amazed by the devout and saintlike expression it wore.

“You are right, my friend. I am always foolish to set my foot on your earth.”

“Yes, dear Seraphita, be my star, and do not leave the place whence you shed such a bright light upon me.”

As he spoke, he put out his hand to take hers, but she withdrew it, with no sign of disdain or anger. Wilfrid rose abruptly and walked to the window, turning his back so that Seraphita might not see the tears that gathered in his eyes.

“Why do you weep?” she said. “You are no longer a child, Wilfrid. Come, come back to me, I insist upon it. You sulk when I ought to be angry. You see that I am ill, and you compel me, by your absurd doubts, to think, to speak, or to share whims and ideas that weary me. If you had the intelligence that is a part of my nature, you would have sung to me, you would have soothed my *ennui* to sleep; but you love me for yourself and not for me.”

The storm that was raging in Wilfrid’s heart was suddenly calmed by these words; he drew near

slowly, the better to contemplate the ravishing creature who lay stretched out before his eyes, reclining gracefully, leaning on her elbow in a seductive position, her head on her hand.

"You think that I do not love you," she continued. "You are mistaken. Listen to me, Wilfrid. You are beginning to know much, for you have suffered much. Let me tell you your thoughts. Would you like to take my hand?"

She rose to a sitting position, and in her fascinating movements she seemed to radiate light.

"Does not a maiden who allows her hand to be taken make a promise, and should she not fulfil it? You know well that I cannot be yours. Two sentiments govern the passions that captivate earthly women. Either they devote themselves to suffering, degraded, criminal beings, whom they seek to console, to raise from their degradation, to redeem; or they give themselves to beings of superior mould, sublime and strong, whom they seek to understand and to worship, and by whom they are often crushed. You have been degraded, but you have purified yourself in the fire of repentance, and you are great to-day; I feel that I am too weak to be your equal, and I am too religious to humble myself to any power other than that of the Most High. Your life, my friend, may be interpreted thus: we are in the North, among the clouds, where abstractions are current."

"You kill me, Seraphita, when you talk so," he replied. "It always pains me to see you make use of the abnormal knowledge with which you strip all

human things of the properties imparted to them by time, space, and form, to analyze them mathematically by some scientific process or other, as geometry treats the bodies whose solidity it abstracts."

"Very well, Wilfrid, I will obey you. Let us drop the subject. How do you like that bear-skin rug my poor David has placed there?"

"Why, very much."

"You did not know that I had this *doucha greka*, did you?"

It was a sort of cloak, made of cashmere lined with black fox, the name signifying *warm to the heart*.

"Do you believe that any sovereign of any court possesses such a piece of fur?"

"It is worthy of her who wears it."

"And whom you consider very fair?"

"Mere human words are not suited to her, one must speak to her heart to heart."

"You are very good, Wilfrid, to soothe my weariness with sweet words—which you have said to others."

"Farewell!"

"Stay. I love you well, you and Minna, doubt it not! But I think of you as blended in a single being. So united, you are a brother, or, if you please, a sister to me. Marry, so that I may see you happy before leaving this sphere of pain and trials forever. Great Heaven, simple-minded women have obtained everything from their lovers! They have said to them: 'Hold your peace!' And

they have become mute. They have said to them: 'Die!' And they have died. They have said to them: 'Love me from afar!' And they have remained at a distance, like courtiers before a king. They have said to them: 'Marry!' And they have married. But I wish you to be happy and you refuse me. Am I, then, powerless? Ah! well, Wilfrid, listen, come nearer to me: yes, I should be sorry to see you marry Minna; but, when I am no longer with you, then promise me that you will be joined to her; Heaven destined you for each other."

"I have listened to you with delight, Seraphita. Incomprehensible as your words are, they charm the ear. But what do you mean?"

"You are right, I forget to be foolish, to be the poor creature whose weakness pleases you. I annoy you, and you came to this uncivilized region in search of repose, exhausted as you were by the fierce assaults of an unappreciated genius, overdone by the patient toil of science—you who have almost dipped your hands in crime and worn the chains of human justice."

Wilfrid had fallen half-dead on the floor. But Seraphita breathed on the young man's brow, and he instantly fell asleep quietly at her feet.

"Sleep and rest," she said, rising from her seat.

She placed her hands upon Wilfrid's head, and the following sentences followed one another from her lips, each in a different tone from the others, but melodious all, and stamped with a kindliness that seemed to emanate in misty waves like the beams

with which the profane goddess chastely envelops the beloved shepherd during his sleep:

“I may show myself to you as I am, dear Wilfrid, for you are strong.

“The hour has come, the hour when the brilliant gleams of the future cast their reflections upon men’s souls, the hour when the soul bestirs itself in its freedom.

“Now, I may venture to tell you how dearly I love you. Do you not see what sort of love mine is, a love devoid of any selfish interest, a sentiment concerned with you alone, a love that follows you into the future to illumine the future for you? for such a love is the true light. Now can you comprehend how ardently I long to know that you are quit of this life which weighs upon you, and to see you even nearer than you are to the world where love endures forever? Must not one suffer who loves for a lifetime only? Have you never felt a longing for everlasting love? Do you understand now to what ravishing joy a creature rises, when she has a two-fold nature to love him who never betrays love, him at whose feet men kneel in adoration?

“I would that I had wings, Wilfrid, that I might shelter you with them, I would that I had strength to give you to enable you to enter before your time the world where the purest bliss of the purest passion that is known on this earth would be a shadow in the light that constantly illumines and gladdens the heart.

“Forgive a loving heart for having put before you

in a word the picture of your faults, with the charitable purpose of soothing the sharp sting of your remorse! Harken to the musical strains of pardon! Refresh your heart by breathing the air of the dawn that is breaking for you beyond the darkness of death. Yes, your life lies beyond!

“May my words reproduce the radiant forms of your dreams, may they deck themselves with images, blaze forth, and descend upon you. Ascend, ascend to the point where all men can see one another distinctly, although as closely crowded together and as small as the grains of sand on the seashore. Mankind has unrolled like a piece of ribbon; observe the varying shades of that flower from the celestial gardens. Do you see those who lack intelligence, those who are beginning to acquire it, those who have been tested, those who are in love, those who are wise and who aspire to the world of light?

“Do you comprehend by this visible thought the destiny of mankind? whence it comes and whither it goes? Continue in your course! When you reach the goal of your journey, you will hear the trumpets of Omnipotence ring out and shouts of victory resound, and chords of which a single one would cause the earth to tremble, but which lose themselves in a world without east or west.

“Do you understand, my poor sorely-tried love, that, were it not for the lethargy, the mists of sleep, such spectacles would rend and whirl away your intelligence, as a tempest rends and whirls away a feeble sail, and would deprive a man of his reason

forever? do you know that the soul alone, when raised to its omnipotence, is hardly able to resist in dreams the devouring communications of the Spirit?

“Fly on through the radiant and luminous spheres, admiring as you go. Flying thus, you obtain rest, you proceed without fatigue. Like all men, you would like to remain always in those spheres of sweet perfume and of light to which you are going, light as air throughout your unconscious body, and where you will speak by thought! Run, fly, enjoy for a moment the wings you will win, when love is so complete within you that you will cease to have passions, that you will be all intelligence and all love! The higher you ascend, the less you think of precipices! there are no precipices in heaven. Observe him who speaks to you, him who supports you above the world in which the precipices are. Look, gaze at me a moment more, for henceforth you will see me only indistinctly as you see me by the light of the pale, earthly sun.”

Seraphita rose to her feet, her head slightly bent, her hair dishevelled, in the ethereal attitude in which all the sublimest painters have represented messengers from on high; the folds of her clothing had the same indefinable charm that forces the artist—the man who translates everything by sentiment—to pause before the exquisite lines of the veiled antique *Polyhymnia*. Then she held out her hand, and Wilfrid rose. When he looked at Seraphita, the pale young girl was lying on the bear-skin, her head

resting on her hand, her features tranquil, her eyes gleaming. Wilfrid gazed silently at her, but a respectful fear was visible in his face and betrayed itself in his timid manner.

“Yes, dear one,” he said, at last, as if he were answering a question, “we are separated by whole worlds. I am resigned, and I can only worship you. But what will become of poor me, when I am all alone?”

“Have you not your Minna, Wilfrid?”

He hung his head.

“Oh! do not be so disdainful; woman understands everything through love; when she does not understand, she feels; when she does not feel, she sees; when she neither sees nor feels nor understands, why, then that terrestrial angel divines your existence in order to protect you, and conceals her protection beneath the fascination of love.”

“Seraphita, am I worthy to belong to a woman?”

“You have suddenly become very modest; can it be a snare? A woman is always so moved to see her weakness glorified! But come to drink tea with me on the day after to-morrow, in the afternoon; good Monsieur Becker will be here, and you will see Minna, the most innocent creature whom I know in this world. Now leave me, my friend; I have to pray at great length to expiate my sins.”

“How can you sin?”

“My poor dear, is it not pride to abuse one’s power? I think I have been too proud to-day. Come, away with you. Farewell until to-morrow.”

"Until to-morrow," echoed Wilfrid in a feeble voice, gazing long at the creature before him, for he wished to carry away an ineffaceable picture of her in his heart.

Although he intended to go away, he stood for some time outside the Swedish château, looking at the light that shone through the windows.

"What have I seen?" he asked himself. "She is not a mere creature, she is a whole creation. Of this world, dimly seen through mists and clouds, I retain faint echoes, like the memory of a vanished grief, or like the confused state caused by dreams in which we hear the lamentations of bygone generations mingled with the melodious voices from the exalted spheres where all is light and love. Am I awake? Am I still sleeping? Have I rescued my eyes from sleep, those eyes from which luminous spaces recede indefinitely, and which follow the spaces? Despite the cold night air, my head is still on fire. I will go to the parsonage! with the pastor and his daughter, I shall be able to collect my thoughts."

But not yet did he leave the spot from which he could look into Seraphita's salon. That mysterious creature seemed to be the radiating circle of an atmosphere which formed about her, greater in extent than that of other beings; whoever entered it underwent the influence of an eddying whirl of dazzling beams and consuming thoughts. Forced to struggle against that inexplicable force, Wilfrid did not triumph over it without a superhuman effort; but after he had passed beyond the precincts of that house, he

recovered his freedom of action, hurried away to the parsonage, and soon found himself beneath the high wooden archway that served as a peristyle to Monsieur Becker's dwelling. He opened the first door, sheathed with *naev*, against which the wind had driven the snow, and knocked hastily at the inner door, saying:

"Will you allow me to pass the evening with you, Monsieur Becker?"

"Yes!" cried two voices as one.

Upon entering the parlor, Wilfrid gradually returned to real life. He saluted Minna most affectionately, pressed Monsieur Becker's hand, and contemplated a picture whose details calmed the convulsions of his physical nature, in which a phenomenon took place comparable to that which sometimes takes place in men accustomed to prolonged meditations. If some pregnant thought bears away a scholar or a poet on its chimera's wings and removes him from the external circumstances that hedge him in on earth, whirling him through the boundless regions where the vastest collections of fact become abstractions, where the most stupendous works of nature are mere images, woe to him, if some sudden sound strikes upon his senses and recalls his adventurous mind to its prison of flesh and blood! The conflict between those two powers, the body and the mind, one of which partakes of the property of invisible action possessed by the lightning, while the other shares with sentient nature that yielding resistance which momentarily

defies destruction; that conflict, or, better still, that horrible conjunction, engenders indescribable suffering. The body demands the return of the flame that consumes it, and the flame seizes its prey anew. But that fusion does not take place without the effervescence, the explosions, and the torments which we see in chemistry when two antagonistic elements, which it has striven to unite, are separated. For some days past, whenever Wilfrid entered Seraphita's presence, his body fell into an abyss. By a single glance, that strange creature led him in thought to the sphere to which meditation leads the scholar, to which prayer transports the religious mind, to which his visions entice an artist, to which sleep carries some men; for every man has his voice to beckon him to the higher abysses, every man has his guide to direct his steps thither, and one and all suffer on their return. There only are the veils torn away, there only does Revelation show itself in its nakedness, a dazzling, awful disclosure of an unknown world, of which the mind brings back to earth naught but fragments. To Wilfrid an hour passed with Seraphita often resembled the dreams the *thériakis* love, in which each nervous papilla becomes a centre of delirious enjoyment. He left her presence as exhausted as a young girl who had worn herself out following a giant. The cold air began to allay by its stinging blows the morbid excitement caused by the combination of his two violently sundered natures; then he always went back to the parsonage, drawn to Minna by the thought of the

tranquil home life for which he thirsted, as a European traveller thirsts for his native land when homesickness seizes him amid the fairy-like scenes that lured him to the Orient. At that moment, more exhausted than he had ever been, the stranger sank into an armchair, and stared about for some time like a man just waking. Monsieur Becker and his daughter, evidently accustomed to their guest's peculiarities, both continued to work.

The ornaments of the parlor consisted of a collection of Norwegian insects and shells. Those curiosities, skilfully arranged upon the yellow background of the fir with which the walls were wainscoted, formed a rich tapestry to which tobacco smoke had imparted its dingy tint. At the rear of the room, opposite the doorway, was an enormous wrought-iron stove, which, under the careful rubbing of the maid-servant, shone like polished steel. Seated in a capacious upholstered easy-chair, in front of a table near the stove, with his feet in a sort of foot-bag, Monsieur Becker was reading a huge folio which rested upon a pile of books as upon a desk; at his left were a jug of beer and a glass; at his right was a smoky fish-oil lamp. The clergyman seemed to be a man of some sixty years. His face was of the type familiar to Rembrandt's brush; there were the small, bright eyes, encircled by wrinkles and overhung by thick grizzly eyebrows; the white hair escaping in two fleecy waves from beneath a black velvet cap, the broad, smooth forehead, the peculiar shape of the face, made almost square by the great

size of the chin; then there was the profound tranquillity which indicates to the careful observer power in some direction, either the royalty that wealth bestows, the magisterial power of the burgomaster, the consciousness of artistic talent, or the cubical strength of happy ignorance. That handsome old man, whose rotundity denoted robust health, was enveloped in a dressing-gown of coarse cloth, simply trimmed with list. He was puffing gravely at a long meerscham pipe, and at regular intervals emitted a cloud of smoke, following with distraught eye its fantastic wreaths, engaged, doubtless, in assimilating by some process of mental digestion the ideas of the author whose work he had in hand.

On the other side of the stove, near a door leading to the kitchen, Minna's form could be vaguely distinguished in the fog produced by the smoke, to which she seemed thoroughly habituated. On a small table before her were the necessary utensils of a housewife: a pile of napkins, stockings to be darned, and a lamp like that which gleamed on the white pages of the book in which her father seemed to be absorbed. Her fresh young face, whose contour was of extreme delicacy and purity, harmonized with the innocence written upon her white brow and in her limpid eyes. She sat erect upon her chair, bending toward the light a little in order to see better, and displayed unwittingly the beauty of her figure. She was already dressed for the night in a *peignoir* of white cotton. A simple lawn cap, with no other ornament than a ruff of the same

material, covered her hair. Although buried in some secret reflection, she counted, without a mistake, the threads of her napkin or the stitches of her stocking. Thus she presented the truest and most perfect type of the woman destined for household duties, whose glance might pierce the clouds around the sanctuary, but who was held back at man's level by a thought at once humble and charitable.

Wilfrid had thrown himself into a chair between the two tables, and gazed with a sort of bewilderment at that harmonious picture, with which the clouds of smoke were not out of keeping.

The single window by which the parlor was lighted during the summer was carefully closed. In lieu of curtains, an old piece of tapestry hung in great folds from a wooden rod. There was nothing picturesque, nothing striking, but absolute simplicity, genuine kindliness, the unreserve of nature, and all the customs of domestic life, undisturbed and free from care. Many dwellings have the appearance of a dream, the glitter of the pleasures that are tasted therein seems to conceal ruins beneath the cold smile of luxury; but that parlor was sublime in its reality, harmonious in its coloring, and awoke the patriarchal theory of a busy, meditative life. The silence was broken by the footsteps of the servant as she prepared the supper, and by the sizzling of the dried fish which she was frying in salt butter according to the custom of the country.

"Will you smoke a pipe?" said the pastor, seizing

a moment when he thought that Wilfrid could hear him.

"Thanks, dear Monsieur Becker."

"You seem to be feeling worse than usual to-day," said Minna, impressed by the weakness betrayed in the stranger's voice.

"I am always like this when I come from the château."

Minna started.

"It is occupied by a strange person, pastor," he continued, after a pause. "During the six months I have been in this village, I have not dared to ask you any questions about her, and I am obliged to do myself violence in order to speak to you of her to-day. I began by regretting very keenly that my journey was interrupted by the coming of winter and that I was compelled to remain here; but, in these last two months, the chains that bind me to Jarvis have been more firmly riveted every day, and I am afraid of ending my days here. You know how I met Seraphita, how great an impression her features and her voice made upon me, and how I was at last admitted to her house, although she will never consent to receive anyone. On the first day, I returned here to ask you to enlighten me concerning that mysterious creature. Then began for me the series of enchantments—"

"Enchantments!" cried the pastor, shaking the ashes from his pipe into a common plate filled with sand, which he used as a cuspidor. "Is there such a thing as enchantment?"

“Certainly, you who are at this moment reading so conscientiously Jean Wier’s *Incantations*, will understand such description as I am able to give you of my sensations,” Wilfrid replied, without hesitation. “If one studies nature attentively, in its greatest upheavals as well as in its most trivial works, it is impossible not to recognize the possibility of enchantment, giving that word its true meaning. Man does not create forces, he employs the only one which exists and which includes them all, motion, the inexplicable breath of the Sovereign Maker of worlds. The species are too thoroughly separated to be blended by the hand of man; and the only miracle of which that hand was capable was accomplished in the union of two repugnant substances. But powder is germane to lightning! As to the creation of some new thing, and suddenly! why, creation demands time under all circumstances, and time neither advances nor recedes under the finger. And so, outside of ourselves, plastic nature acts in obedience to laws whose order and practice can never be disarranged by any man’s hand. But, having thus disposed of material things, it would be unreasonable not to recognize in ourselves the existence of a tremendous power, the effects of which are so immeasurable that generations past have never classified them perfectly. I do not refer to the faculty of separating yourself from your surroundings, of constraining nature to confine itself within the limits of the word,—the act of a giant, upon which the common herd reflects no more than

it thinks of motion, but which had led the Indian Theosophists to explain creation by a word to which they attributed the inverse power. The smallest morsel of their food, a grain of rice, from which a creation goes forth and in which a creation is contained alternately, presented to their minds so perfect an image of the word that creates and the word that abstracts, that it seemed very simple to apply that theory to the creation of worlds. The majority of men were certain to content themselves with the grain of rice sown in the first verse of all geneses. Saint John's saying that the Word was in God served only to complicate the difficulty. But the sowing, the germination, and the blossoming of our ideas are trivial matters, if we compare those properties, common to many men, to the truly individual power of communicating to those properties a more or less vigorous strength by some indefinable process of concentration, of raising them to the third, the ninth, the twenty-seventh power, of making them in that way take hold of the masses, and of obtaining magical results by condensing the effects of nature.

“Now, I give the name of enchantments to those extraordinary antics played by two membranes on the canvas of our brains. In the unexplored wilds of the spiritual world there are certain beings who are armed with these incredible faculties, which may fitly be compared to the terrible power possessed by gases in the physical world, and who combine with other beings, permeate them as an active

principle, produce within them effects as of sorcery, against which the poor slaves are defenceless; they bewitch them, rule them, reduce them to a horrible state of serfdom, and impose upon them the grandeur and the sceptre of a superior nature, acting sometimes after the manner of the electric eel, which magnetizes and benumbs the fisherman; sometimes like a dose of phosphorus, which overexcites the faculties or accelerates the currents of life; sometimes like opium, which puts the bodily nature to sleep, releases the mind from its bonds, allows it to soar above the world, shows the world to it through a prism, and extracts therefrom the sustenance that most delights it; and sometimes like catalepsy, which deadens all the faculties for the benefit of a single vision. Miracles, enchantments, incantations, sorcery, in a word, all the acts improperly called supernatural, are possible, and can be explained only as a result of the despotism with which a mind forces us to undergo the effects of a mysterious optical illusion, which enlarges, diminishes, exalts the faculty of creation, makes it move within us at its pleasure, disfigures or embellishes it in our eyes, takes us to heaven or plunges us into hell,—the two terms by which extreme pleasure and extreme pain are expressed. These phenomena are within us, not outside. The creature whom we call Seraphita seems to me to be one of those rare and redoubtable demons to whom is given the power to enslave men, to hasten the course of nature, and to share the occult power of God. Her enchantment began in my case

with the silence which was imposed upon me. Whenever I dared think of questioning you about her, it seemed to me as if I were on the point of revealing a secret of which I should be an incorruptible depositary; whenever I attempted to question you, a burning seal was placed upon my lips and I became the involuntary minister of that mysterious prohibition. You see me here now for the one hundredth time, depressed, exhausted, because I have been playing with the world of hallucinations which that girl bears within her—a girl who is in the eyes of you two a sweet, fragile creature, but in mine the most cruel of magicians. Yes, she is to me like a sorceress, who carries in her right hand an invisible apparatus for disturbing the equilibrium of the globe, and in her left hand lightning with which to annihilate everything at her pleasure. At last, the time has come when I cannot look at her brow; it gleams with unendurable brilliancy. For the last few days I have been skirting the precipices of folly too awkwardly to keep silent. Therefore I seize the moment when I have courage to resist that monster who drags me after her, without asking me if I am able to follow her flight. Who is she? Did you know her as a child? Was she ever born? Had she any parents? Was she the offspring of the union of the ice and the sun? She freezes and burns, she appears and disappears like a jealous truth, she attracts me and repels me, she gives me life and death by turns, I love her and I hate her. I can live no longer thus, I must be altogether in heaven or in hell.”

Holding in one hand his freshly-filled pipe, and in the other the lid which he did not replace, Monsieur Becker listened to Wilfrid with a mysterious expression, glancing now and then at his daughter, who seemed to understand that language, harmonizing as it did with the being who inspired it. Wilfrid was as handsome as Hamlet resisting the appeals of his father's ghost, with whom he converses when he appears to him alone among the living.

"That strongly resembles the harangue of a man in love," said the worthy pastor, ingenuously.

"In love!" echoed Wilfrid; "yes, according to vulgar ideas. But, my dear Monsieur Becker, no words can describe the frenzy with which I rush toward that wild creature."

"You love her, then?" said Minna, in a reproachful tone.

"Mademoiselle, I am so strangely agitated when I see her, and so profoundly sad when I go from her sight, that any man, experiencing similar emotions, would seem to be in love; but that sentiment draws two persons passionately together, whereas between her and myself an abyss constantly yawns, whose cold breath freezes my blood when I am in her presence, but of which I am no longer conscious when I am away from her. I am always more despairing than ever before when I leave her, I always return to her with greater ardor, like a scholar in quest of a secret, whom nature repels; like the painter who seeks to depict life upon his canvas and exhausts his

own strength and all the resources of his art in that vain attempt."

"That all seems very true to me, monsieur," the maiden artlessly replied.

"How can you know anything about it, Minna?" inquired the old man.

"Ah! father, if you had gone with us this morning to the summit of the Falberg and had seen her praying, you would not ask me that question! You would say as Monsieur Wilfrid said when he first saw her in our temple: 'She is the genius of prayer.'"

Her last words were followed by a moment's silence.

"Ah!" exclaimed Wilfrid, "she certainly has nothing in common with the creatures who swarm in the hollows of this globe."

"On the Falberg!" cried the old pastor. "How did you succeed in reaching it?"

"I have no idea," replied Minna. "The walk seems to me now like a dream of which the memory alone remains! Perhaps I should not believe in it without this material testimony."

She took the flower from her corsage and held it up. They all sat with their eyes fixed on the pretty saxifrage, which was still fresh, and, with the lamps shining brightly upon it, gleamed amid the clouds of smoke like another light.

"This is truly supernatural," said the old man, at sight of a flower in full bloom in winter.

"An unfathomable mystery!" cried Wilfrid, excited by the perfume.

"This flower gives me the vertigo," rejoined Minna. "I fancy that I still hear his voice, which is the music of thought, as I still see the light of his glance, which is love."

"In pity's name, my dear Monsieur Becker, tell me the story of Seraphita, that enigmatical human flower whose image we have before us in this mysterious blossom."

"My dear guest," the old man replied, emitting a cloud of smoke, "in order to tell you of that creature's birth, it is necessary to clear away the mists from the most obscure of all Christian doctrines; but it is not easy to make one's self clear in speaking of the most incomprehensible of revelations, the last outburst of the faith which has shone upon our heap of mud. Do you know of Swedenborg?"

"By name only; but I know nothing of the man, of his books, of his religion."

"Very well, I will tell you the whole history of Swedenborg."

III

SERAPHITA-SERAPHITUS

After a pause, during which the pastor seemed to be brushing up his memory, he continued in these words:

“Emmanuel Swedenborg was born at Upsala, in Sweden, in the month of January, 1688, according to some authorities; in 1689, according to his epitaph. His father was Bishop of Skara. Swedenborg lived nearly eighty-five years, his death having taken place at London, March 29, 1772. I make use of that expression to denote a change of condition simply. According to his disciples, Swedenborg was seen in Jarvis and in Paris subsequently to that date.—I beg your pardon, my dear Monsieur Wilfrid,” said the pastor, with a gesture intended to forestall any interruption, “I narrate facts as I have heard them, without affirming or denying their truth. Listen to me, and afterward you may form such opinion of them as you choose. I will tell you when I propose to discuss, criticise, or pass judgment upon doctrines, in order to establish my intellectual neutrality between reason and HIM!

“The life of Emmanuel Swedenborg was divided into two parts,” continued the pastor. “From 1688 to 1745, Baron Emmanuel Swedenborg appeared to the world as a man of immense learning, esteemed and beloved for his virtues, leading an absolutely irreproachable and constantly useful life. While exercising important public functions in Sweden, he published, between 1709 and 1740, numerous and valuable books, which enlightened the scientific world, upon mineralogy, physics, mathematics, and astronomy. He invented the method of constructing docks to receive vessels. He wrote upon the most important questions, from the rise and fall of tides to the position of the earth in space. He invented at the same time a method of building better locks for canals, and more simple processes for the extraction of metals. In fact, he did not turn his attention to a single science without causing distinct progress to be made therein. During his youth, he studied Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and the Oriental tongues, which became so familiar to him that several illustrious professors frequently consulted him, and he was able to identify in Tartary fragments of the most ancient book of Holy Writ, called the *Wars of Jehovah*, and the *Enunciations*, mentioned by Moses in the Book of *Numbers*,—xxi. 14, 15, 27–30,—* by Joshua, by Jeremiah, and by Samuel. *The Wars of Jehovah* would seem to have been the historical part and the *Enunciations* the prophetic part of that book, which was anterior to Genesis. Swedenborg went

* These references are to the Douai Bible.

so far as to assert that the *Jaschar*, or the *Book of the Just*, mentioned by Joshua, existed in Eastern Tarry, with the worship of *Correspondences*. A Frenchman, they say, has recently confirmed Swedenborg's theories, announcing that he has found in Bagdad several portions of the Bible hitherto unknown in Europe.

"At the time of the discussion, almost European in extent, to which animal magnetism gave rise, and in which almost all scholars took an active part, in 1785, Monsieur le Marquis de Thomé avenged Swedenborg's memory by challenging assertions let fall by the commissioners appointed by the King of France to investigate the subject of magnetism. Those gentlemen declared that there was no known theory of the action of the magnet, whereas Swedenborg had evolved such a theory as early as 1720. Monsieur de Thomé seized that opportunity to explain the motives of the oblivion in which the most famous men left the learned Swede, in order that they might overhaul his treasures to assist them in their own works. "Some of the most illustrious scholars," said Monsieur de Thomé, alluding to Buffon's *Théorie de la Terre*, "are weak enough to array themselves in the peacock's feathers without doing homage to him therefor." And he proved triumphantly, by citations from Swedenborg's encyclopædic works, that that great prophet was several centuries in advance of the slow progress of the human sciences: indeed, one need only read his philosophical and mineralogical works to be convinced

of it. In one passage, he shows himself the precursor of the chemistry of to-day, when he asserts that all organic natural products are decomposable and may be reduced to two pure principles; that water, air, and fire *are not elements*. In another, he goes in a few words to the bottom of the mysteries of magnetism, and thus deprives Mesmer of the honor of having first become acquainted with them.—There,” said Monsieur Becker, pointing to a long shelf between the stove and the window, upon which stood numerous books of all sizes, “are seventeen different works, a single one of which, the *Œuvres Philosophiques et Mineralogiques*, comprises three folio volumes. Those productions, which bear witness to Swedenborg’s positive knowledge, were given to me by his cousin, Monsieur Seraphitus, Seraphita’s father. In 1740, Swedenborg relapsed into absolute silence, from which he emerged only to lay aside his temporal occupations and to devote his thoughts exclusively to the spiritual world. He received his first commands from Heaven in 1745. He described his calling in this way:

“One evening, in London, after he had dined heartily, a dense mist filled his chamber. When it disappeared, a creature who had assumed human form stood in the corner and said to him, in a terrible voice:

“‘Do not eat so much!’

“Thereupon he adopted a rigid diet. On the following night, the same man came, radiant with light, and said to him:

“ ‘I am sent to you by God, who has chosen you to explain to mankind the meaning of His word and His creations. I will dictate to you what you must write.’

“ The vision lasted a very few moments. The ANGEL was clad in purple, he said. During that night, the eyes of his *inner man* were opened, and he was able to look into heaven, into the world of spirits and into hell: three distinct spheres, wherein he recognized persons whom he had known, who had perished in their human form, some long before, others within a short time. Thereafter Swedenborg constantly lived a spirit life, and remained in this world as one sent by God. Although his mission was disputed by incredulous minds, his conduct was visibly that of a being superior to mankind. In the first place, although his means required him to confine himself to the strict necessities of life, he gave away immense sums, and in more than one commercial centre he was known to have rehabilitated great business houses that had failed or were on the point of failing. No man who ever appealed to his generosity failed to depart at once content. An incredulous Englishman set out in pursuit of him, met him in Paris, and reported that the doors of his house were always open. One day, his servant, having deplored his negligence in that particular, which rendered him liable to be suspected of any thefts of which his master might be the victim:

“ ‘Let him be easy,’ said Swedenborg, smiling, ‘I pardon his distrust, for he does not see the watchman who guards my door.’

“It was the fact that, wherever he lived, he never closed his doors, and nothing was ever taken from him.

“At Gothenburg, sixty miles from Stockholm, he announced, three days before the arrival of the courier with the news, the precise hour of the conflagration that laid Stockholm in ashes, observing that his own house was not burned; which was true. The Queen of Sweden told the King of Prussia, her brother, at Berlin, that one of her ladies-in-waiting, being sued for a sum of money which she knew that her husband had paid before he died, but for which she could find no receipt, went to Swedenborg, and begged him to ask her husband where the evidence of payment could be found. The next day, Swedenborg told her where the receipt was; but as, in accordance with the lady's wish, he had requested the deceased to appear to his wife, she saw her husband in a dream, dressed in the *robe de chambre* he wore just before he died, and he showed her the receipt in the place indicated by Swedenborg, where it really was hidden. One day, as he was leaving London, on Captain Dixon's vessel, he heard a lady asking if they had laid in an ample stock of provisions.

“‘We do not need so much,’ he replied. ‘A week from to-day, at two o'clock, we shall be in the harbor of Stockholm.’

“And so it proved. The visionary state into which Swedenborg threw himself at pleasure, with respect to earthly things, and which astounded by its marvellous results all those who came in contact with

him, was only a trivial application of his power of seeing beyond the skies. Among these visions, the one in which he describes his travels in the *astral regions* is not the least interesting, and his descriptions inevitably surprise one by the ingenuousness of the details. A man whose vast scientific learning is beyond dispute, who combined in himself conception, will, imagination, would certainly have invented something better if he had invented at all. The fanciful literature of the orientals offers nothing that can afford an idea of that astounding work, overflowing with poetic thoughts in germ, if I may venture to compare a work of faith to the productions of the Arabian imagination. The abduction of Swedenborg by the angel who acted as his guide in his first journey is marked by a sublimity which surpasses, by as great a distance as God has placed between the earth and the sun, that of the great epics of Klopstock, Milton, Tasso, and Dante. That passage, which serves as an introduction to his work on the *astral regions*, has never been published; it belongs to the traditions bequeathed by Swedenborg to the three disciples who were nearest his heart. Monsieur Silverichm possesses it in writing. Monsieur Seraphitus attempted now and then to talk with me about it; but the memory of his cousin's words was so vivid that he would stop at the first word, and fall into a reverie from which nothing could coax him. The speech in which the angel proved to Swedenborg that our bodies were not made to wander about alone, overwhelms all human learning,

so the baron told me, beneath the swelling periods of a divine logic. According to the prophet, the inhabitants of Jupiter do not cultivate the sciences, which they call shadows. The inhabitants of Mercury abhor the expression of ideas by words, which seem to them too materialistic; they have an ocular language; those of Saturn are constantly tempted by evil spirits; those of the Moon are as small as children six years old, their voices seem to proceed from the abdomen, and they crawl; those of Venus are of gigantic stature, but unintelligent, and live by brigandage; a portion of that planet, however, is occupied by people of a most peaceful disposition, who live in the love of the good. In short, he describes the manners and customs of the peoples inhabiting those globes, and interprets the general significance of their existence with relation to the universe, in terms so precise, he offers explanations which harmonize so perfectly with the results of their apparent revolutions in the general system, that it is more than likely that scholars will some day come to drink of those luminous springs. These are the words with which he brings the work to a close," said Monsieur Becker, taking up a book and opening it at the place at which the bookmark was inserted:

" 'If anyone doubts that I was actually taken to a great number of astral worlds, let him recall my observations concerning distances in the other life; they exist only in reference to the outward condition of life; now, inasmuch as I am constituted

inwardly like the angelic spirits of those worlds, I was able to become acquainted with them.'

"The circumstances to which we owed the presence in this canton of Baron Seraphitus, Swedenborg's beloved cousin, explain my familiarity with all the incidents of that extraordinary life. He was accused of imposture in certain public journals of Europe, which gave currency to the following statement based upon a letter of Chevalier Beylon. Swedenborg, it was said, *being informed by certain senators of the secret correspondence between the late Queen of Sweden and her brother the Prince of Prussia, revealed its secrets to that princess, and allowed her to believe that he had obtained his information by supernatural means.* A man entirely worthy of faith, Monsieur Charles Leonard de Stahlhammer, a captain in the royal guard and a Knight of the Sword, answered the calumny by a letter."

The pastor looked among a number of papers in his table-drawer, and finally found a newspaper, which he handed to Wilfrid, who read aloud the following letter:

"STOCKHOLM, May 13, 1788.

"I have read with amazement the letter relating to the interview between the famous Swedenborg and Queen Louise-Ulrique; the alleged facts are entirely false, and I hope that the author will pardon me if I prove to him how far he has gone astray, by a faithful narrative, the truth of which can be attested by several persons of distinction who were present, and who are still living. In 1758, a short time after the death of the Prince of Prussia, Swedenborg came to the court: he was accustomed to appear there at regular intervals. He was no sooner

in the queen's presence than she said to him: 'By the way, Herr Assessor, have you seen my brother?'—Swedenborg replied that he had not, and the queen rejoined: 'If you meet him, salute him for me.'—In saying that, she had no other purpose than to jest and had not the remotest thought of asking him for any information concerning her brother. A week later, and not twenty-four days, Swedenborg came again to the court so early in the morning that the queen had not left her apartment, called the *white chamber*, where she was talking with her maids of honor and other ladies of the court. Swedenborg did not wait for the queen to come out, but went at once to her apartment and whispered in her ear, but did not have a private audience. The queen was so thunderstruck that she had an ill turn and required some time to recover. When she came to herself, she said to those about her: 'Nobody but God and my brother could possibly know what he told me!' She admitted that he had spoken of her latest correspondence with that prince, the subject of which was known to themselves alone. I cannot explain how Swedenborg became acquainted with that secret; but I am able to assert upon my honor, that neither Count H—, as the author of the letter states, nor any other person, intercepted or read the queen's letters. The Senate of those days allowed her to write to her brother with perfect freedom, and looked upon that correspondence as of no concern to the State. It is evident that the author of the letter I have referred to is altogether unacquainted with the character of Count H—. That venerable nobleman, who has rendered most valuable services to his country, combines great intellectual powers with excellent qualities of the heart, and his advanced age has not impaired those precious gifts. Throughout his whole administration he displayed the most enlightened political wisdom in conjunction with the most scrupulous integrity, and proclaimed himself the enemy of secret intrigues and underhand manœuvring, which he considered unworthy means of attaining his object. Nor was the author any better acquainted with Swedenborg. The only weakness of that genuinely

honest man was a proneness to believe in spiritual apparitions; but I knew him for many years, and I can bear witness that he was as firmly persuaded that he had conversed with spirits, as I am persuaded that I am writing these words at this moment. As a citizen and as a friend, he was a man of the utmost integrity, with a horror of imposture, and he led a most exemplary life. Thus the explanation of this incident which Chevalier Beylon has undertaken to give is seen to be entirely without foundation; and the visit paid to Swedenborg during the night by Counts H— and T— is conclusively contradicted. The author of the letter may be assured that I am very far from being a follower of Swedenborg; only the love of truth has prompted me to give an accurate account of a fact which has been so often described with an entire absence of truth, and I declare that what I have written is the exact truth, and in witness thereof I set my hand to this letter."

"The proofs of his mission which Swedenborg supplied to the royal families of Sweden and Prussia doubtless originated the belief entertained by several prominent personages of those two courts," continued Monsieur Becker, replacing the paper in the drawer. "However," he said, "I will not relate all incidents of his material and visible life: his habits made it impossible for them to be fully known. He lived in retirement, having no desire to become rich or to gain celebrity. Indeed, he was remarkable for a sort of repugnance to making converts, he opened his mind to but few persons, and imparted his external gifts only to those in whom faith, virtue, and love made themselves clearly manifest. He had the art of detecting at a single glance the mental condition of those who approached him, and transformed

to seers those whom he deigned to touch with his inward speech. After the year 1745, his disciples never knew him to do any act from any human motive. A single person, a Swedish priest named Matthésius, accused him of madness. By a strange chance, this Matthésius, who was an enemy of Swedenborg and his writings, went mad a short time after, and was still living at Stockholm a few years ago, with a pension granted by the King of Sweden. Moreover, a eulogy of Swedenborg, composed with the most painstaking care so far as the incidents of his life were concerned, was pronounced in the great hall of the Royal Academy of Sciences at Stockholm, in 1786, by Monsieur Sandel, councillor to the College of Mines. Lastly, a statement received by the Lord Mayor of London describes Swedenborg's last illness and death to the smallest details; he was attended at that time by Monsieur Férélius, a Swedish ecclesiastic of the highest distinction. Those persons who were present bear witness that Swedenborg, far from denying his writings, constantly asserted their truth.

“‘A hundred years hence,’ he said to Férélius, ‘my doctrine will govern the Church.’

“He predicted with absolute accuracy the day and the hour of his death. On that day, Sunday, March 29, 1772, he asked what time it was.

“‘Five o'clock,’ was the reply.

“‘It is all over,’ he said. ‘God bless you!’

“Ten minutes later he tranquilly breathed his last, uttering a faint sigh. Simplicity, modesty, solitude,

were the leading features of his life. When he had finished one of his treatises, he would go to London or Holland to have it printed, and he never mentioned it. He published in that way, one after another, twenty-seven different treatises, all written, as he said, at the dictation of angels. Whether that be true or not, few men are strong enough to endure their flaming eloquence. There they all are," said the pastor, pointing to a second shelf upon which were some threescore volumes. "The seven treatises upon which the spirit of God has cast its most brilliant beams are: *The Delights of Conjugal Love*; *Heaven and Hell*; *The Apocalypse Revealed*; *The Exposition of the Inward Sense*; *Divine Love*; *True Christianity*; *The Angelic Wisdom of the Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnipresence of those who Share the Eternity, the Immensity of God*. His interpretation of the Apocalypse begins with these words," continued Monsieur Becker, taking down and opening the volume nearest him: "'In this book I have put nothing of my own, I have spoken according to the Word of the Lord, who said to John by the mouth of the same angel: 'Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book.'" —*Apocalypse* xxii. 10.

"My dear monsieur," said the pastor, looking up at Wilfrid, "I have often trembled in every limb, during the long winter nights, reading the awe-inspiring works in which that man asserts the most marvellous things with perfect sincerity.

"'I have seen heaven and the angels,' he says.

‘The spirit man sees the spirit man much more clearly than the earthly man sees the earthly man. In describing the marvels of the heavens and the regions beneath the heavens, I obey the commands of the Lord so to do. People are at liberty to refuse to believe me, I cannot put others in the condition in which God has put me; it is not in my power to allow them to hold converse with angels, nor to perform the miracle of developing their understanding; they themselves are the only instruments of their elevation to the level of the angels. For twenty-eight years past I have lived in the spirit world with the angels, and on earth with men; for it has seemed good to the Lord to open the eyes of my spirit as he opened those of Paul and Daniel and Elisha.’

“Nevertheless, certain persons have visions of the spiritual world by reason of the complete severance of their external and internal beings caused by somnambulism.

“‘In that condition,’ says Swedenborg in his *Treatise on Angelic Wisdom*, No. 257, ‘man may be exalted even to the celestial light, because, the corporeal senses being nullified, the influence of Heaven acts without opposition upon the inward man.’

“Many people, who have no doubt that Swedenborg received revelations from on high, consider, nevertheless, that all his writings are not equally stamped with divine inspiration. Others insist upon absolute assent to Swedenborg’s doctrines, while admitting his obscurities; but they believe that the imperfections of earthly language prevented the

prophet from describing his spiritual visions, whose obscurities disappear in the eyes of those whom faith has regenerated; for, adopting the sublime expression of his most illustrious disciple, *the flesh is an external generation*. To poets and writers generally, his marvellous charm is unbounded; to seers, everything in his works is absolutely real. His descriptions have been subjects of scandal to some Christians. Certain critics have cast ridicule upon the divine substance of his temples, his golden palaces, his superb country-houses in which angels disport themselves; others have made merry over his thickets of mysterious trees, his gardens in which the flowers talk, where the air is white, where the mystic jewels, the sardius, the carbuncle, the chrysolite, the chrysoprasus, the cyanite, the chalcedony, the beryl, the *Urum* and the *Thummim*, are endowed with motion, are divine truths and can be questioned, for they reply by variations of light—*True Religion*, 219;—many intelligent minds do not admit the existence of his worlds where the colors give delightful concerts, where speech emits flames, where the Word is written in little horns—*True Religion*, 278.—Even in the North, some writers have laughed at his doors of pearls, at the diamonds that adorn the hangings and furniture of the houses of his Jerusalem, where the most trivial utensils are made of the rarest substances of the globe.

“‘But,’ say his disciples, ‘because all these objects are scarce in this world, is that any reason why they should not be abundant in the other? On

earth, they are of earthly substance, whereas, in heaven, they are exposed to the celestial glamour and exist, as it were, in the angelic state.'

"On this same subject, Swedenborg repeated these great words of Jesus Christ: 'If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?'—Saint John iii. 12.

"I, monsieur, have read Swedenborg from beginning to end," resumed Monsieur Becker, with an emphatic gesture. "I say it with pride, because I have retained my reason. In reading him, one must either lose one's mind or become a seer. Although I have avoided those two forms of madness, I have often experienced unfamiliar ecstasy, profound impressions, inward joys, which naught but the fulness of truth, the manifestation of the celestial light, can give. Everything here below seems trivial when the mind is running through the intense pages of these treatises. It is impossible not to be struck with amazement when you consider that, within a period of thirty years, that man published, on the subject of the truths of the spiritual world, twenty-five quarto volumes, written in Latin, the smallest of which contains five hundred pages, and which were all printed in small type. He left twenty others in London, it is said, in the hands of his nephew, Monsieur Silverichm, formerly chaplain to the King of Sweden. Unquestionably, the man who, between his twentieth and sixtieth year, exhausted himself by the publication of a sort of encyclopædia,

must have received some supernatural assistance to enable him to produce these vast treatises at a time of life when man's powers begin to fail. In these works there are tens of thousands of numbered passages, not one of which is inconsistent with any other. In all of them, accuracy, method, clarity of reasoning, stand prominently forth, and are attributable to one and the same fact, the existence of the angels. His *True Religion*, in which his whole doctrine is summed up, a work instinct with vigorous intelligence, was conceived and executed at the age of eighty-three. Indeed, his universality, his omniscience, are denied by none of his critics nor by his enemies.

“Nevertheless, when I drank of that torrent of celestial knowledge, God did not open my inward eyes, and I judged these writings with the cold reasoning of an unregenerate man. So that it has frequently seemed to me that Swedenborg the INSPIRED must sometimes have misunderstood the angels. I have laughed at several visions, which I should have implicitly believed in and admired, according to the seers. I have been unable to form any conception of the hornlike writing of the angels, or of their girdles, the gold in which is more or less light. For example, although the sentence: *There are solitary angels*, moved me strangely at first, on reflection I could not see how such solitude was consistent with their marriages. I could not understand why the Virgin Mary should continue to wear white satin garments in heaven. I have ventured to wonder

why the gigantic demons Enakim and Hephilim always fought the cherubim in the apocalyptic fields of Armageddon. I am at a loss to know how devils can still dispute with angels. Baron Seraphitus maintained that those details referred to angels who lived on earth in the human form. The visions of the Swedish prophet are often marred by grotesque figures. One of his *Memorabilia*, which was the name he gave them, begins with these words: 'I saw an assemblage of spirits, they had hats on their heads.' In another, he receives from heaven a bit of paper upon which he sees, so he says, the letters used by primitive peoples, consisting of curved lines with little rings extending upward. For the better attestation of his communication with heaven, one might wish that he had deposited that paper with the Royal Academy of Sciences of Sweden. But perhaps I am wrong, perhaps the material absurdities scattered through his works have some spiritual meaning. Otherwise, how are we to account for the growing influence of his doctrines? His Church to-day numbers more than seven hundred thousand faithful, as well in the United States of America, where different sects coalesce, as in England, where there are seven thousand Swedenborgians in the city of Manchester alone. Men as distinguished by their learning as by their social position, in Germany, in Prussia, and in the North, have publicly announced their conversion to Swedenborg's doctrines, which are more consoling than those of other Christian communions. I would that I were able to set forth

in a few succinct words the main points of the doctrine laid down by Swedenborg for his church; but such a summary, made entirely from memory, would necessarily be incomplete. I can only venture, therefore, to speak to you of the mysteries which have some connection with Seraphita's birth."

At that point, Monsieur Becker paused and seemed to reflect as if to collect his ideas; then he continued thus:

"After he has mathematically demonstrated that man lives forever in the infernal as well as in the supernal spheres, Swedenborg gives the name of *angelic spirits* to the beings who are prepared in this world for heaven, where they become angels. According to his theory, God did not create angels as a special race; there are no angels who have not been men on earth. Thus the earth is the nursery of heaven. The angels, therefore, are not angels of themselves—*Angelic Virtue*, 57;—they are transformed by virtue of an intimate connection with God, which God never refuses, the essence of God being incessantly active, not negative. Angelic spirits pass through three varieties of love, for man can become regenerate only by successive degrees—*True Religion*.—First, LOVE OF SELF: the supreme manifestation of that love is human genius, whose productions call forth enthusiastic admiration. Second, LOVE OF THE WORLD, which produces prophets, the great men whom the world takes for guides and hails by the name of divine. Last, LOVE

OF HEAVEN, which produces angelic spirits. Those spirits are, so to speak, the flowers of mankind, which reaches its highest development in them and labors so to develop itself. They must have either the love of heaven or the wisdom of heaven; but they always pass through love to wisdom. Thus the first transformation of man is LOVE.

“To attain that first step, his previous *existences* must have known the hope and the charity which fit him for faith and prayer. The ideas acquired by the practice of those virtues are transmitted to each new human envelope beneath which are hidden the metamorphoses of the INWARD BEING; for none of them can be dispensed with, all are essential: hope is of no avail without charity, faith has no efficacy without prayer; the four faces of that square are inseparable. ‘For lack of one virtue,’ he says, ‘the angelic spirit is like a shattered pearl.’ Each of those previous *existences*, therefore, is a circle in which are displayed the celestial treasures of the anterior state. The marvellous perfection of the angelic spirits is due to this mysterious progression wherein nothing is lost of the qualities successively acquired in order to attain their glorious incarnation; for, at every transformation, they lay aside, by insensible degrees, the flesh and its errors. When man lives in love, he has abandoned all his evil passions: hope, charity, faith, prayer, have, to use the expression of Isaiah, *fanned* his inward being, which can no more be polluted by any earthly affection. Whence those beautiful words of Saint Luke: *Lay*

up for yourselves an imperishable treasure in heaven. And these words of Jesus Christ: *Leave this world to men, it is theirs; make yourselves pure and come to my father.* The second transformation is WISDOM. Wisdom is the understanding of the divine things to which the spirit attains through love. The spirit of love has overcome force; as a result of its victory over all earthly passions, it loves God blindly; but the spirit of wisdom is intelligent and knows why it loves. The wings of the one are unfolded and carry it away toward God; the wings of the other are held fast to its sides by the terror born of knowledge: it knows God. One constantly longs to see God and rushes toward Him, the other touches Him and trembles. The conjunction of a spirit of love and a spirit of wisdom raises the creature to the divine state during which his mind is WOMAN, and his body is MAN, the supreme development of humanity, in which spirit carries the day over form, in which form still struggles against the divine spirit; for form, that is, the flesh, does not understand, rebels, and prefers to remain immature. That supreme test causes incredible suffering which Heaven alone sees, and which Christ knew on the Mount of Olives. After death, the first heaven is thrown open to this twofold purified nature. Thus men die in despair, while the spirit dies in ecstasy. Thus the NATURAL, the state of unregenerate beings; the SPIRITUAL, the state of angelic spirits; and the DIVINE, the state of the angel before breaking his envelope, are the three degrees of existence by which man attains heaven.

A reflection of Swedenborg's will explain to you with marvellous clearness the difference between the NATURAL and the SPIRITUAL.

“ ‘With men,’ he says, ‘the natural passes into the spiritual, they view the world in its visible form, and in an atmosphere of reality adapted to their senses. But with the angelic spirit, the spiritual passes into the natural, it views the world in its inward spirit and not in its form.’

“ In like manner, our human knowledge is simply an analysis of forms. He whom the world considers a learned man is purely exterior, as his learning, his *inward being*, serves no other purpose than to preserve his aptitude for understanding the truth. The angelic spirit goes further than that: its knowledge is the thought of which human knowledge is only the word; it derives its knowledge of things from Holy Writ, by learning the CORRESPONDENCES which bring heaven and earth into accord. The WORD of God was written throughout with reference to these correspondences, it conceals an inward or spiritual meaning which cannot be understood without a knowledge of the correspondences. ‘There are,’ says Swedenborg,—*Celestial Doctrine*, 26,—‘innumerable ARCANUM in the hidden meaning of correspondences.’ The men who made sport of the books in which the prophets set forth the Word of God were in the same condition of ignorance as those men of the present day who know nothing of a science and make sport of the truths of that science. To be familiar with the correspondences between the Word

and the heavens, to be familiar with the correspondences that exist between the visible and tangible things of the earthly world and the invisible and intangible things of the spiritual world, is *to have heaven in one's understanding*. All the objects of the various creations having emanated from God, necessarily intend a hidden meaning, as is said in the words of Isaiah: *The earth is a garment*.—This mysterious bond between the smallest particle of matter and heaven constitutes what Swedenborg calls an *Arcanum Cœlestium*. His *Treatise upon the Arcana Cœlestia*, in which are explained the correspondences between the natural and the spiritual and their significance, being designed to give *the signature of everything*, to employ the expression of Jacob Bøhm, contains no less than sixteen volumes and thirteen thousand propositions.

“ ‘This marvellous knowledge of correspondences, which God in His goodness allowed Swedenborg to acquire,’ says one of his disciples, ‘is the secret of the interest aroused by these works.’ According to that commentator, ‘there everything is derived from heaven, everything reminds one of heaven. The prophet’s writings are intelligible and sublime: he speaks in heaven and makes himself heard on earth; one could base a volume on one of his phrases.’

“And the disciple cites this among a thousand others:

“ ‘The kingdom of heaven,’ says Swedenborg,—*Arcana Cœlestia*,—‘is the kingdom of motives. ACTION begins in heaven and extends to the earth, and,

by degrees, to the infinitely small things of earth; earthly effects being connected with their heavenly causes, the result is that everything CORRESPONDS and is SIGNIFICANT. Man is the bond of union between the natural and the spiritual.'

"The angelic spirits, then, are, generally speaking, acquainted with the correspondence between every earthly thing and something in heaven, and know the secret meaning of the prophetic words which tell of earthly revolutions. And so to those spirits everything on earth has its significance. The tiniest flower is a thought, a life, which corresponds to some features of the great whole, of which they have a constant intuitive consciousness. To them the ADULTERY and debauchery mentioned by the Scriptures and the prophets, who are often maltreated by self-styled writers, signify the condition of the souls of those who on this earth persist in contaminating themselves with earthly affections, and thus perpetuate their divorce from heaven. The clouds signify the veil in which God wraps himself. The torches, the shewbread, the horses and the horsemen, the harlots, the precious stones, everything in the Scripture has to them an exquisite meaning, and discloses the future of earthly things in their relations with heaven. They can all fathom the truth of the ENUNCIATIONS of Saint John, which human science eventually demonstrates and proves; as this one, for instance, which is, according to Swedenborg, pregnant with the essence of several human sciences: *I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth*

*had passed away.—Apocalypse xxi. 1.—They are familiar with the feasts at which the flesh of kings, of free men, and of slaves is served, and to which an angel standing in the sunlight bids them come.—Apocalypse xix. 11–18.—They see the winged woman, clad in the sun's rays, and the man always armed.—Apocalypse.—*The horse of the Apocalypse is, says Swedenborg, the visible image of human intelligence ridden by Death, for it carries the elements of its destruction. Lastly, they recognize the nations concealed under shapes which seem fanciful to the ignorant. When a man is prepared to receive the prophetic insufflation of the theory of correspondences, it awakes in him the spirit of the Word; he understands then that creation is only transformation; it vivifies his intellect and arouses in him an ardent thirst for the truth, which can be slaked only in heaven. He comprehends, according to the greater or less degree of perfection which his inward sense has attained, the power of the angelic spirits, and goes forward, guided by desire, the least imperfect condition of unregenerate man, toward hope, which opens to him the world of spirits; then he arrives at prayer which gives him the key to heaven. What human creature would not long to make himself worthy to enter the sphere of those intellects which live secretly by love or by wisdom? Here on earth those spirits remain pure during their lives; they do not see nor think nor speak like other men. There are two kinds of perception: one inward, the other exterior; man is all exterior, the angelic spirit is all inward.

The spirit goes to the root of numbers, it understands them thoroughly, it knows their meanings. It governs motion at its pleasure and makes itself a part of everything by virtue of its ubiquity.—*An angel*, according to the Swedish prophet, *appears to another whenever he desires*—*Sap. Ang. de Div. Am.*;—for he has the gift of quitting his body, and sees heaven as the prophets saw it, and as Swedenborg himself saw it.

“‘In that condition,’ he says,—*True Religion*, 136,—‘a man’s spirit is transported from place to place, the body remaining where it is,—a condition in which I lived for twenty-six years.’

“We should understand in that sense all those passages in the Bible where it is said: *The spirit carried me away*. Angelic wisdom is to human wisdom what the innumerable forces of nature are to its action, which is one. Everything lives, moves, and has its being in the spirit, for it is in God; such is the thought expressed by Saint Paul’s words: *In Deo sumus, movemur et vivimus*. Earth offers no obstacle to the spirit, even as the Word offers no obscurity. Its approaching divinity enables it to see God’s thought veiled by the Word; even as the spirit, living by its inward perception, communicates with the secret meaning hidden under all the things of this world. Knowledge is the language of the temporal world, love is the language of the spiritual world. Man describes more than he explains, while the angelic spirit sees and understands. Knowledge saddens man, love exalts the angel. Knowledge is

still seeking, love has found. Man judges nature according to his relations with it; the angelic spirit judges it according to its relations with heaven. Moreover, everything speaks to the spirits. The spirits are in the secret of the harmony of the various creations among themselves; they are in accord with the spirit of sound, with the spirit of color, with the spirit of plant-life; they can question the mineral, and the mineral answers their thoughts. What are earthly knowledge and earthly treasures to them, when their eyes embrace them all at every moment, and when the worlds with which the thoughts of so many men are engrossed are to the spirits simply the topmost step from which they are about to dart upward to God? The love of heaven or the wisdom of heaven is indicated in them by the circle of light which surrounds them and which the elect can see. In their innocence, of which the innocence of children is the outward form, they have a knowledge of things which children have not: they are innocent and learned.

“‘And,’ says Swedenborg, ‘the innocence of heaven makes such an impression upon the mind, that they who are affected thereby retain an ecstatic memory of it that endures through life, as I have myself experienced.—It is sufficient, perhaps,’ he says again, ‘to have only the slightest perception of it to be changed forever and to long to go to heaven and thus enter the sphere of hope.’

“His doctrine concerning marriages may be reduced to these few words:

“ ‘The Lord took the beauty, the refinement, of man’s life, and transferred it to woman. When man is not reunited to the beauty and refinement of his life, he is harsh, uncouth, and melancholy; when he is reunited to it, he is joyous and happy, he is complete.’

“The angels are always perfectly beautiful. Their marriages are celebrated by wonderfully impressive ceremonies. In those unions, of which no children are born, the man gives UNDERSTANDING, the woman gives WILL: they become a single being, ONE FLESH here on earth; then they go to heaven after assuming the celestial form. On earth, in the natural state of man, the natural inclination of the sexes for each other is an EFFECT which brings weariness and distaste in its train; but in their celestial guise, the two who have become *the same* spirit find in themselves a never-failing source of pleasure. Swedenborg witnessed this marriage of spirits, which, according to Saint Luke, is no marriage,—xx. 35,—and inspires only spiritual enjoyment. An angel offered to allow him to witness a marriage, and bore him away upon his wings:—the wings are a symbol, not a terrestrial reality. He dressed him in his festal robe, and when Swedenborg found himself clothed in light, he asked why it was.

“ ‘On these occasions,’ the angel replied, ‘our robes become radiant and shine and become nuptial robes.’—*Delights of Conjugal Love*.

“Thereupon he saw two angels, one of whom came from the south, the other from the east; the

angel from the south rode in a chariot drawn by two white horses whose reins were of the color and brilliancy of the dawn; but when they were close by him, in the sky, chariot and horses vanished. The angel from the east, clad in purple, and the angel from the south, clad in hyacinth, rushed together like two breezes and were indistinguishably blended: one was an angel of love, the other an angel of wisdom. Swedenborg's guide informed him that those two angels had been connected on earth by a close friendship and had always continued united although separated by space. Consent, which is the essential of lawful marriages on earth, is the normal state of the angels in heaven. Love is the light of their world. The everlasting bliss of the angels is due to the faculty God bestows upon them of giving back to Him the joy that they feel. This infinite mutuality of pleasure is their life. In heaven they become infinite by partaking the essence of God which is born of itself. The immensity of the heavens where the angels live is such, that, if man were endowed with vision as swift as the light that comes from the sun to the earth, and if he should gaze throughout all eternity, his eyes would never reach a horizon upon which they could rest. The light alone suffices to explain the felicity that reigns in heaven. It is, he says,—*Angelic Wisdom*, 7, 25, 26, 27,—a vapor of the virtue of God, a pure emanation of His radiance, in comparison with which our bright sunlight is darkness. It can accomplish anything, it revivifies everything, and is not absorbed;

it envelops the angel and places him in touch with God by means of the infinite delights which multiply endlessly of themselves. That light destroys every man who is not prepared to receive it. No one on earth, nor even in heaven, can look upon God and live. That is why, it is said,—*Exodus* xix. 12, 13, 21, 22, 23,—that bounds should be set about the mountain whereon Moses spake with the Lord, lest anyone should touch it and therefore be put to death. And again,—*Exodus* xxxiv. 29-35,—that, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in his hand, his face shone so that he was obliged to cover it with a veil, so that no one might die while he was speaking to the people. The transfiguration of Jesus Christ typifies both the radiance shed abroad by a messenger from heaven and the ineffable bliss that the angels experience from being constantly flooded with it. *His face*, says Saint Matthew,—xvii. 1-5,—*shone like the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.—And a bright cloud overshadowed his disciples.* And so, when a planet contains only beings who deny God, when His Word is neglected, when the angelic spirits have been summoned from the four corners of space, God sends an exterminating angel to transform the substance of the refractory world which is to Him, in the immensity of the universe, what an unfruitful seed is in nature. As he approaches the globe, the exterminating angel, riding on a comet, makes it turn upon its axis: thereupon the continents become the bottoms of seas, the loftiest

mountains become islands, and countries formerly covered with the waters of the sea reappear in their brilliant garb, obeying the laws of Genesis; then the Word of God reasserts its power over a new earth which retains everywhere the effects of the earthly water and the heavenly fire. The light brought by the angel from on high makes the sun's light seem pale. Thereupon, as Isaiah says, the men enter into the clefts of the rocks, they hide their faces in the dust. They cry to the mountains: 'Fall upon us!' To the sea: 'Take us!' To the air: 'Hide us from the fury of the Lamb!'—The Lamb is the favorite image of the angels who are slighted and persecuted on earth. And so Christ said: 'Blessed are they who suffer! Blessed are the pure in heart! Blessed are they who love!'—The whole of Swedenborg's doctrine is found in those words: To suffer, to have faith, to love. To love truly, must not one have suffered, and must not one have faith? Love engenders strength, and strength gives wisdom; thence is derived intelligence; for force and wisdom import will. To be intelligent is to have knowledge, wisdom, and power, the three attributes of the angelic spirit.

"'If the universe has a meaning, it is the meaning most worthy of God,' said Monsieur Saint-Martin to me, when I saw him during his travels in Sweden.

"But, monsieur," continued Monsieur Becker, after a pause, "what significance have these fragments culled here and there from a work of which one can give no idea, save by comparing it to a flood of light, to billows of flame? When a man

plunges into it, he is carried away by a terrible current. Dante Alighieri's poem seems a mere speck to him who plunges into the innumerable verses in which Swedenborg brings the celestial worlds before us, as Beethoven built his palaces of harmony with myriads of notes, as architects erect their cathedrals with myriads of stone. You wander about in bottomless abysses, where your mind does not always sustain you. Surely it is necessary to have a powerful intellect in order to return thence to our social ideas, safe and sound.

"Swedenborg," continued the pastor, "was particularly attached to the Baron de Seraphitz, whose name, according to an ancient Swedish custom, had been written from time immemorial with the Latin termination *us*. The baron was the most ardent disciple of the Swedish prophet, who had opened the eyes of his inward man, and had formed him for a life consistent with the commands from on high. He sought an angelic spirit among women, and Swedenborg found such a one for him in a vision. His betrothed was the daughter of a cobbler in London, in whom, so said Swedenborg, heavenly life was most brilliantly exemplified, and who had passed the preliminary tests. After the prophet's transformation, the baron came to Jarvis to consummate his celestial nuptials by prayer. For my own part, monsieur, as I am not a seer, I saw only the earthly works of that couple: their life was in very truth the life of the saints whose virtues are the glory of the Roman Church. They both devoted themselves to relieving

the poverty of the people, and supplied them, one and all, with such sums as did not indeed enable them to live without a little work, but sufficed for their absolute needs; the servants who lived with them never knew them to exhibit anger or impatience; they were invariably beneficent and gentle, overflowing with amiability, grace, and true goodness; their marriage was the harmonious union of two souls never disunited. Two eider-ducks flying in company, sound and its echo, thought and its verbal expression, are, perhaps, imperfect symbols of that union. In this place, everyone loved them with an affection which can be described only by comparing it to the love of the plant for the sun. The woman was simple in her manners, lovely in form and feature, and of a noble bearing like that of the most august personages. In 1783, in the twenty-sixth year of her age, that woman gave birth to a child; its coming into the world was an occasion of solemn rejoicing. Thus the husband and wife bade farewell to the world, for they told me that they should undoubtedly be transformed when their child should have laid aside the garment of flesh, which required their care until the moment when the strength to exist by itself should be bestowed upon it. The child was born, and was this same Seraphita who is in our minds at this moment; after her birth, her father and mother led a more solitary life than before, raising themselves heavenward by prayer. Their one hope was to see Swedenborg, and their faith brought the fulfilment of their hope.

On the day of Seraphita's birth, Swedenborg appeared in Jarvis and filled with a flood of light the room in which the child lay. His words, it is said, were these:

“‘The work is accomplished, the heavens rejoice!’

“The servants in the house heard strangely melodious sounds which, they said, seemed to be borne on the winds from all points of the compass. Swedenborg's spirit beckoned the father from the house and led him to the fiord, where it left him. Some of the natives of Jarvis, approaching the barn at that moment, heard him pronounce these beautiful words of Scripture:

“‘How beautiful upon the mountain are the feet of the angel who bringeth good tidings!’

“I was on my way from the rectory to the chateau, to baptize the child, christen her, and perform the duties which the laws impose upon me, when I met the baron.

“‘Your services are not needed,’ he said; ‘our child will have no name on this earth. You shall not baptize with the water of the earthly Church the child who has been immersed in the flames of heaven. That child will remain a flower; you will not see it grow old, you will see it pass away; you have *existence*, it has life; you have outward senses, it has none; it is all inward.’

“These words were uttered in a supernatural voice by which I was even more deeply affected than by the radiance stamped upon his face, which

exuded light. His appearance realized the fantastic images we conceive of the inspired prophets, as we read the prophetic books of the Bible. But such effects are not rare among our mountains, where the nitrogen contained in the everlasting snow produces extraordinary phenomena in our organizations. I asked him the cause of his excitement.

“‘Swedenborg has been with me, I have just left him, I have breathed the air of heaven,’ he replied.

“‘In what shape did he appear to you?’ I asked.

“‘In his mortal shape, dressed as he was the last time I saw him, in London, at Richard Shearsmith’s house, in the district called Coldbath Fields, in July, 1771. He wore his ratteen coat of changeable color, with steel buttons, his waistcoat buttoned to the throat, his white cravat, and the same magisterial wig with powdered rolls at the sides and the hair brushed back in front in such way as to display that noble, luminous brow, so fully in harmony with his great square face, in which all is power and tranquillity. I recognized that nose with its broad nostrils breathing fire; I saw once more that mouth which always smiled, that angelic mouth, whence these words issued, fraught with happiness for me: “We shall soon meet again!” And I felt the splendor of the celestial love.’

“The conviction that shone in the baron’s face forbade all argument,—and I listened to him in silence; his voice had a contagious warmth which made my entrails glow, his fanaticism stirred my heart as another’s anger makes one’s nerves tingle.

I followed him in silence to his house, where I saw the nameless child lying upon her mother, who held her in a mysterious embrace. Seraphita heard me enter, and raised her head to look at me; her eyes were not like those of an ordinary child; I cannot describe the impression they made upon me better than by saying that they seemed to see and think already. That predestined child's infancy was accompanied by climatic conditions most extraordinary in our latitude. For nine years our winters were milder and our summers longer than usual. That phenomenon caused much discussion among scientific men; but, although their explanations may have seemed convincing to the members of the Academy, the baron smiled when I reported them to him. Seraphita was never seen naked as children sometimes are; she was never touched by man or woman; she lived upon her mother's breast and never cried. Old David will confirm these statements if you question him concerning his mistress, for whom he has an adoration like that which the king whose name he bears had for the Ark of the Covenant. At the age of nine, the child began to devote herself to prayer: prayer is her life; you saw her in our little temple at Christmas, the only day she comes there; she stands at some distance from the other Christians there. If there is not that distance between herself and her fellow-men, she suffers. For that reason she remains at the château most of the time. The incidents of her life are not known; she rarely shows herself; her faculties, her sensations—all are inward;

she passes the greater part of the time in the state of mystic meditation usual, say the popish writers, among the early Christian hermits, in whom the tradition of the Word of Christ still lived. Her understanding, her soul, her body, everything about her is as spotless as the snow upon our mountains. At ten years of age, she was just as you see her now. When she was but nine, her father and mother died together, painlessly, without apparent disease, having foretold the hour at which they should cease to live. Standing at their feet, she looked at them with a calm eye, with no indication of sadness or grief or joy or curiosity; her father and mother smiled upon her. When we came to take away the bodies, she said:

“‘Take them away!’

“‘Seraphita,’ I said, for we have always called her so, ‘pray, are you not grieved by the death of father and mother? they loved you so dearly!’

“‘Death?’ said she. ‘Why, no; they are in me forever. These are nothing,’ she added, pointing without the slightest emotion to the bodies that were being removed.

“That was the third time I had seen her since her birth. It is difficult to distinguish her in the temple, for she stands beside the pillar which supports the pulpit, in a shadow which makes it impossible to see her features. Of those who had been servants in the family, the only one remaining at the time of that event was old David, who, despite his eighty-two years, sufficed for his mistress’s needs. Some of the Jarvis people have told marvellous

stories about this girl. As their tales have acquired a certain currency in a country essentially fond of mysteries, I have undertaken to study Wier's *Treatise upon Incantations*, and works relating to demonology, in which are narrated alleged supernatural effects in man, trying to find some facts analogous to those which are attributed to her."

"Then you do not believe in her?" queried Wilfrid.

"Indeed, no," replied the pastor good-humoredly; "in my eyes she is an extremely capricious girl, spoiled by her parents, who turned her head with the religious ideas I have just sketched."

Minna made a motion with her head expressive of mild negation.

"Poor girl!" continued the pastor, "her parents bequeathed to her the deplorable mental exaltation which leads persons of a mystical turn astray and makes them more or less mad. She restricts herself to a diet that drives poor David to despair. That excellent old man resembles a fragile plant which sways in the slightest breeze, which blooms in the slightest ray of sunlight. His mistress, whose incomprehensible language he has adopted, is his wind and his son; in his eyes, her feet are of diamonds and her brow is studded with stars; she walks encircled by a luminous white atmosphere; her words are accompanied by music; she has the power of making herself invisible. Ask to see her: he will tell you that she is travelling among the stars. It is difficult to believe in such fables. As you know, every

miracle resembles more or less the story of the Golden Tooth. We have a golden tooth in Jarvis, that's the whole of it. For instance, Duncker the fisherman declares that he has sometimes seen her dive into the fiord and come out in the form of an eider-duck, and sometimes walking on the waves during a storm. Fergus, who drives the flocks to the *sælers*, says that he has noticed that, in rainy weather, the sky is always bright above the Swedish château, and always blue over Seraphita's head when she comes out. Many women hear the notes of an immense organ when Seraphita comes into the temple, and ask their neighbors in all seriousness if they do not hear them too. But my daughter, of whom Seraphita has seemed very fond for two years past, has heard no music, nor has she smelt the heavenly perfumes with which they say the air is laden when she goes out to walk. Minna has often returned home overflowing with artless girlish admiration of the beauties of our spring; she has seemed intoxicated by the fragrance exhaled by the first buds of the larches, pines, or flowers, which they had breathed together; but, after such a long winter, nothing can be more natural than that excessive enjoyment. There is nothing very extraordinary in this demon's society, is there, my child?"

"His secrets are not mine," replied Minna. "With him, I know everything; away from him, I know nothing: with him, I cease to be myself; away from him, I entirely forget that blissful life. To see him is a dream, the memory of which abides with

me or not, as he pleases. I have heard when with him, but forgotten when away from him, the music to which Bancker's wife and Erikson's refer; with him, I have smelt celestial perfumes and seen marvellous things, and I lose all remembrance of them here."

"The thing that has surprised me most since I have known her," said the pastor, addressing Wilfrid, "is her allowing you to be with her."

"With her!" said the young man; "she has never let me kiss her, or even touch her hand. When she saw me for the first time, her glance cowed me; she said to me: 'Welcome to this place, for you were destined to come.' She seemed to know me. I trembled. Fear made me believe in her."

"And love made me," said Minna, without a blush.

"Are you not laughing at me?" said Monsieur Becker, laughing good-naturedly; "you, my daughter, in claiming to be a spirit of love, and you, monsieur, in making yourself out a spirit of wisdom?"

He drank a glass of beer, and did not notice the singular glance Wilfrid bestowed upon Minna.

"Joking aside," the minister resumed, "I was very greatly surprised to learn that to-day, for the first time, these two madcaps have been to the summit of the Falberg; is it anything more than the exaggeration of a couple of girls who have climbed some little hill? It is impossible to reach the summit of the Falberg."

"Father," said Minna, in a voice denoting deep

emotion, "then I must have been in the demon's power, for I climbed the Falberg with him."

"This is becoming serious," said Monsieur Becker; "Minna has never told a falsehood."

"Monsieur Becker," rejoined Wilfrid, "I give you my word that Seraphita exerts such extraordinary power over me that I know of no words that will convey an idea of it. She has told me things that nobody but myself could possibly know."

"Somnambulism!" rejoined the old man. "Several occurrences of that nature are reported by Wier as phenomena readily explainable, and observed long ago in Egypt."

"Lend me Swedenborg's theosophical works," said Wilfrid; "I am anxious to plunge into those abysses of light, you have given me a thirst for them."

Monsieur Becker handed a volume to Wilfrid, who at once began to read. It was about nine o'clock. The servant appeared to serve supper. Minna made the tea. The repast at an end, all three became deeply engrossed, the pastor reading the *Treatise upon Incantations*, Wilfrid imbibing the spirit of Swedenborg and Minna sewing, lost in her memories. It was a true Norwegian evening party, peaceful, studious, full of thought, of flowers under the snow. As he devoured the pages of the prophet, Wilfrid ceased to live by his external senses. Now and then the pastor, with a half-serious, half-laughing expression, called Minna's attention to him, whereupon she smiled with a sort of sadness.

Meanwhile, Seraphitus's face, hovering over the cloud of smoke that enveloped all three of them, smiled upon Minna.

The clock struck twelve. The outer door was violently thrown open. Heavy, precipitate steps, the steps of a terrified old man, were heard in the narrow anteroom between the two doors. Then David abruptly appeared in the parlor.

"Violence! violence!" he cried. "Come! come all! The demons are unloosed! they have mitres of fire on their heads! There are Adonises, Vertumnuses, sirens! they are tempting him as Jesus was tempted on the mountain. Come and drive them away!"

"Do you recognize Swedenborg's language? there you have it unadulterated," laughed the pastor.

But Minna and Wilfrid gazed in terror at old David, who, his white hair flying, wild-eyed, his legs trembling and covered with snow,—for he had come without snow-shoes,—stood there swaying to and fro as if a mighty wind were blowing upon him.

"What has happened?" Minna asked him.

"Why, the devils hope and intend to reconquer him."

Those words made Wilfrid's heart beat fast.

"For nearly five hours she has been standing with her eyes raised to heaven and arms outstretched; she suffers, she cries out to God. I cannot pass the bounds of the circle, hell has stationed Vertumnuses as sentinels. They have built walls of fire between her and her old David. If she needs me, what shall I do? Help me! come and pray!"

The poor old man's despair was horrible to see.

"The radiance of God defends her; but suppose she should yield to violence?" he continued, with fascinating good faith.

"Silence! David, do not talk nonsense! This is a statement to be verified. We will accompany you," said the pastor, "and you will see that there are neither Vertumnuses, nor devils, nor sirens in your house."

"Your father is blind," said David to Minna in an undertone.

Wilfrid, upon whom the reading of one of Swedenborg's earlier treatises, which he had rapidly run through, had produced a most prodigious effect, was already in the corridor, engaged in putting on his snow-shoes. Minna was ready in a moment. They left the two old men behind and hurried away toward the Swedish château.

"Do you hear that cracking?" said Wilfrid.

"The ice in the fiord is moving," replied Minna; "but the spring will soon be here."

Wilfrid was silent. When they were both in the courtyard, they did not feel that they had either the ability or the strength to enter the house.

"What do you think of her?" asked Wilfrid.

"What a brilliant light!" cried Minna, as she took her place in front of the window of the salon. "There he is! my God, how handsome he is! O my Seraphitus, take me!"

The girl's exclamation was entirely mental. She saw Seraphitus standing, lightly enveloped in an

opal-colored mist which escaped from that almost phosphoric body.

"How lovely she is!" cried Wilfrid, also mentally.

At that moment, Monsieur Becker arrived, followed by David; he saw his daughter and the stranger standing in front of the window, stood beside them, looked into the salon, and said:

"Well, David, she is saying her prayers."

"But just try to go in, monsieur."

"Why disturb those who are praying?" replied the pastor.

At that moment, the moon rose over the Falberg and its beams fell upon the window. They all turned, impressed by that natural phenomenon, which startled them; but when they turned again to look at Seraphita, she had disappeared.

"That is very strange!" said Wilfrid in surprise.

"I heard entrancing sounds!" said Minna.

"Well, what of it?" said the pastor; "she has gone to bed, no doubt."

David had entered the house. They returned to the rectory in silence; no two of them understood the meaning of that vision in the same way: Monsieur Becker was sceptical, Minna adored, Wilfrid desired.

Wilfrid was a man of thirty-six. Although very fully developed, his proportions were not inharmonious. He was of medium height, like almost all men who raise themselves above their fellow-men; his chest and shoulders were broad and his neck was short, like that of a man whose heart seems to

be near his head; his hair was black and thick and fine; his eyes, of a light-brown shade, possessed a sunlike brilliancy which showed how eagerly his nature longed for the light. Although his virile, excited features were lacking in the inward calmness imparted by a life without storms, they indicated the inexhaustible resources of impetuous feelings and the appetites of instinct; just as his motions indicated the perfection of physical conformation, the flexibility of the muscles and the fidelity of their play. That man might contend with the savage, hear like him the step of a foe far away in the forest, scent his presence in the air, and detect a friend's signal on the horizon. He slept lightly, like all creatures who do not wish to be surprised. His body speedily placed itself in harmony with the climate of the countries to which his adventurous life led him. Art and science would have admired that man's organization as a model for mankind; in him all things were in equilibrium: impulse and heart, intellect and will.

At first, it seemed as if he should be classed among the purely instinctive beings who abandon themselves blindly to their material needs; but, in the morning of his life, he had found his way into the social circle to which his feelings guided him; study had broadened his intelligence, meditation had sharpened his thought, the sciences had enlarged his understanding. He had studied human laws, the action of selfish interests brought into play by passions, and seemed to have made himself familiar

early in life with the abstract ideas upon which societies rest. He had grown pale over books, which are the dead acts of mankind; then he had passed sleepless nights in European capitals amid festivals; he had awakened in more beds than one; he had slept, it may be, upon the battle-field during the night preceding the combat and the night following the victory; it may be that, in his stormy youth, he had sailed to the most strikingly contrasted portions of the globe on the deck of a corsair; thus he was familiar with the living acts of mankind. He knew the present and the past, the history of ancient times and of to-day. Many men have been, like Wilfrid, equally strong in hand and heart and head; like him, the majority of them have abused their threefold power. But, even if that man were still allied to the degraded portion of humanity by his outer envelope, he certainly belonged in equal degree to the sphere where force is intelligent. Despite the veils in which his mind enveloped itself, there were to be seen in him those indescribable symptoms that are visible to the eye of pure creatures, of children whose innocence has felt the breath of no evil passion, of the old man who has regained his innocence; those marks denoted a Cain who still retained some hope, and who seemed to be seeking absolution in some form at the ends of the earth. Minna suspected in that man the galley-slave of renown, and Seraphita knew him to be such; both admired and pitied him. Whence came their prescience? Nothing could be more simple and

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at the same time more extraordinary. As soon as man attempts to fathom the secrets of nature, where nothing is secret, where it is simply a question of seeing, he discovers that there the simple produces the marvellous.

“Seraphitus,” said Minna one evening, a few days after Wilfrid’s arrival at Jarvis, “you read this stranger’s mind, while I receive only vague impressions from him. He either freezes me or warms me; but you seem to know the cause of that cold or warmth; you can tell me what it is, for you know everything about him.”

“Yes, I have seen the causes,” said Seraphitus, lowering his broad lids over his eyes.

“By what power?” asked the inquisitive Minna.

“I have the gift of specialization,” he replied. “Specialization constitutes a sort of inward sight which penetrates everything; you can understand its extent only by a comparison. In the great cities of Europe, from which come works in which the hand of man strives to represent the effects of the moral nature as well as those of the physical nature, there are men of sublime talent who express ideas with marble. The sculptor works upon the marble: he shapes it, and expresses a world of thoughts therein. There are statues upon which the hand of man has bestowed the power to represent an entire sublime or evil side of humanity; most men see therein a human figure and nothing more; others, occupying a position somewhat higher on the ladder of human beings, detect a portion of the

thoughts translated by the sculptor, they admire the shape of the figure; but they who are initiated in the secrets of the art all fully understand the sculptor: when they look upon his work, they recognize the whole world of his thoughts. They are the princes of art, they bear within themselves a mirror in which nature is reflected in its most minute details. Even so there is within me a mirror in which the moral nature, with its causes and effects, is reflected. I divine the future and the past by thus penetrating the mind. How? you will ask me again. Let the marble statue be the body of a man, let the sculptor be sentiment, passion, vice or crime, virtue, sin, or repentance; then you will understand how I have been able to read the stranger's mind, without, however, being able to explain specialization to you; for, to understand that gift, one must possess it."

Although Wilfrid was allied to the first two branches of mankind, utterly distinct as they are, to the men of force and the men of thought, his excesses, his restless life and his errors, had often led him in the direction of faith; for doubt has two sides, the side of light and the side of darkness. Wilfrid had pressed the world too close in its two forms, mind and matter, not to suffer from the thirst for the unknown, from the desire to go beyond, with which all men are attacked who have knowledge, power, and will. But his knowledge, his acts, his will, were without any guidance. He had shunned social life from necessity, as the great culprit seeks the cloister.

Remorse, that virtue of the weak, did not assail him. Remorse is a species of helplessness, it will sin again. Repentance alone is a force, it puts an end to everything. But Wilfrid, while travelling over the world which he had taken for his cloister, had found balm for his wounds nowhere; he had seen nowhere a nature to which he could cling. In him despair had dried up the springs of desire. He was one of those men who, having fallen out with the passions and found themselves the stronger, have nothing more to squeeze in their gripe; who, in default of an opportunity to place themselves at the head of some of their equals to trample entire peoples under their horses' feet, would purchase at the price of a horrible martyrdom the power to ruin themselves for a belief: sublime cliffs, so to speak, awaiting the touch of a magic wand which would make their far-off springs gush forth anew, but which does not come.

Led by a scheme of his restless, inquisitive life among the roads of Norway, winter had surprised him at Jarvis. On the day when he first saw Seraphita, that meeting caused him to forget his past life. The girl awoke intense sensations which he believed to be beyond resuscitation. The ashes emitted one last flame, and blew away at the first sound of that voice. Who has ever experienced the sensation of becoming young and pure once more after he had grown cold in old age and defiled himself in impurity? Suddenly, Wilfrid loved as he had never loved before; he loved secretly, with intense faith, with terror, with secret frenzy. His life was stirred to its very

source, at the mere thought of seeing Seraphita. When he heard her voice, he was transported to unfamiliar worlds; he was dumb in her presence, she fascinated him. In that desolate spot, under the snow, among the fields of ice, that celestial flower had grown to maturity upon its slender stalk; that flower which was the goal of all his aspiration, hitherto ungratified, and the sight of which aroused the fresh ideas, the hopes, the feelings, that cluster about us to bear us away to higher regions, as the angels bear the elect away to heaven in the symbolic pictures suggested to painters by some familiar genius. A divine perfume softened the granite of that rock, a light endowed with speech shed upon him the divine melodies that accompany the traveller in his heavenward journey. Having drained to the dregs the cup of earthly love which his teeth had broken, he saw before him the chosen vessel in which gleamed limpid waves and which makes one thirst for joys that are never-ending for him who can touch it with lips sufficiently imbued with faith to avoid shattering the crystal. He had found that wall of brass to be surmounted which he had sought throughout the world. He went impulsively to Seraphita, with the purpose of describing to her the bearing of a passion beneath which he was as restive as the horse in the fable beneath the bronze rider whom nothing disturbs, who sits firmly in his saddle, and whom the efforts of the fiery beast serve only to make more burdensome and heavier. He went to her to depict the grandeur of his soul by the grandeur of his errors,

to show her the ruins of his desert places; but, when he had passed the outer walls of the château and found himself within the vast zone embraced by those eyes, whose sparkling azure encountered no limits to their vision, he became as calm and submissive as the lion who, as he rushes upon his prey in an African desert, receives a love-message on the wings of the wind and stops. He opened for himself an abyss into which the words of his frenzy fell, and from which issued a voice which changed his nature: he was a child again, a child of sixteen, timid and fearful before that girl with the tranquil brow, before that white figure whose unalterable calmness resembled the cruel impassiveness of human justice. And the battle had never ceased until that evening, when she had at last overthrown him with a single glance, as a hawk, after describing a series of bewildering spirals around its prey, lets it fall stupefied to the ground before carrying it away to its nest. Long conflicts take place within us, ending in one of our acts, and forming a sort of reverse side of man's nature. That reverse side is turned toward God, the other toward men.

More than once, Seraphita had amused herself by proving to Wilfrid that she was acquainted with that reverse side, different in different individuals, which constitutes a second life with most men. She had often said to him, in her turtle-dove voice: "Why all this anger?" when Wilfrid had registered a vow to carry her away in order to make her his own property. Wilfrid alone was strong enough

to utter the cry of rebellion to which he had given vent at Monsieur Becker's, and which the old man's narrative had quieted. That mocking, insolent man saw at last the dawn of a starlike faith breaking upon his darkness; he asked himself if Seraphita were not an exile from higher spheres returning to her native country. He did not simply decree the honor of deification, which lovers abuse in all countries, to this Norwegian lily, he believed in her. Why did she remain on the shore of that fiord? what was she doing there? Questions that were left unanswered abounded in his mind. Above all, what would come to pass between them? What fate had guided him thither? To him Seraphita was the marble statue, motionless but light as a shadow, which Minna had seen standing on the brink of the chasm: so Seraphita stood on the brink of every chasm, unmoved, without the quiver of an eyelid, without the slightest fear in her eye. Thus his was a love without hope, but not devoid of curiosity. From the moment that Wilfrid suspected the ethereal nature of the sorceress who had told him the secret of her life in blissful dreams, he determined to try to subdue her, to keep her, to steal her from heaven where perhaps her coming was awaited. He would represent the human race, the earth resuming possession of its prey. His pride, the only sentiment whereby man can be exalted for long, would make him happy, because of that triumph, for the rest of his life. At that thought, his blood boiled in his veins, his heart swelled. If he did not succeed, he would tear her

to pieces. It is so natural to destroy what one cannot possess, to deny what one does not understand, to decry what one envies!

The next day, Wilfrid, his mind filled by the thoughts certain to be suggested by the extraordinary spectacle he had witnessed the preceding night, determined to question David, and went to see him, on the pretext of asking for news of Seraphita. Although Monsieur Becker believed that the poor man was in his dotage, the stranger trusted to his own perspicacity to detect the morsels of truth that would be poured forth by the old servant in the torrent of his divagations.

David had the stolid, weak face of the octogenarian: below his gray hair was a brow upon which the wrinkles formed long ruined hummocks; his face was hollowed out like the dry bed of a mountain torrent. His life seemed to have taken refuge entirely in the eyes, wherein a ray of light still gleamed; but that gleam was veiled by clouds, as it were, and suggested the restless wildness as well as the stupid fixity of intoxication. His slow, heavy movements indicated the frosts of age and communicated them to anyone who looked steadfastly at him for a long while, for he possessed the force of torpor. His limited intelligence awoke only at the sound of his mistress's voice, or at the sight or thought of her. She was the soul of that wholly material fragment. Seeing David alone, you would have said that he was a corpse: but if Seraphita appeared or spoke or were mentioned—then the dead came forth

from his tomb, he recovered motion and speech. Never was the apocalyptic image of the dried bones restored to life in the valley of Jehosaphat more fully realized than by that Lazarus constantly recalled to life from the grave by the girl's voice. His language, always figurative, often incomprehensible, prevented the natives from talking with him; but they felt the instinctive reverence of the common people for one who had wandered so far from the beaten track.

Wilfrid found him in the outer room, apparently asleep by the stove. Like a dog who knows the friends of the family, the old man raised his eyes, recognized the stranger, and did not stir.

"Well, where is she?" Wilfrid inquired, taking a seat beside the old man.

David moved his fingers in the air, as if to describe the flight of a bird.

"Is her suffering at an end?" asked Wilfrid.

"Only those creatures who are promised to heaven know how to suffer without their love being diminished by suffering; that is the sign of true faith," replied the old man, gravely, as a musical instrument gives forth a note when touched at random.

"Who told you that?"

"The Spirit."

"What happened to her last night? Did you force your way by the Vertumnuses who acted as sentries? did you glide in among the Mammons?"

"Yes," replied David, as if waking from a dream.

The confused vapor of his eyes melted away before a ray of light that came from his mind and

gradually made them as bright as an eagle's, as intelligent as a poet's.

"What did you see?" queried Wilfrid, amazed by that sudden transformation.

"I saw Species and Forms, I heard the Spirit of Things, I saw the rebellion of the Bad, I listened to the speech of the Good! There were seven demons and seven archangels come down from heaven. The archangels were at a distance, they looked on with veils over their faces. The demons were near at hand, they were brilliantly arrayed and active. Mammon came on his mother-of-pearl shell, in the shape of a lovely nude woman; his body was dazzling in its snowy whiteness, no human form will ever be so perfect, and he said: 'I am Pleasure, and thou shalt possess me!'—Lucifer, the prince of serpents, came in his regal garb, the man in him was as beautiful as an angel, and he said: 'Mankind shall wait upon thee!' The queen of misers, she who never gives up anything she has received, the Sea, arrived, wrapped in her green cloak; she bared her bosom, she showed her casket of precious stones, she vomited forth her treasures and offered them; she summoned waves of sapphires and emeralds; her products bestirred themselves, they came forth from their hiding-places, they spoke; the fairest among the pearls unfolded her butterfly wings, gave forth a bright light, and sang her music of the sea; she said: 'Daughters of suffering both, we are sisters; wait for me! we will go together, I have but to become a woman.' The bird with the wings of

the eagle and the claws of the lion, a woman's head, and the rump of a horse, the Animal, stooped and licked her feet, promising seven hundred years of abundance to his beloved daughter. The most to be feared of all, the Child, crawled to her knees, weeping and saying to her: 'Wilt thou leave me, weak and ill as I am? stay with me, mother!' He played with the others, he diffused sloth through the air, and heaven itself would have listened to his lament. The sweet-voiced Virgin warbled her melodies that relax the soul. The kings of the East came with their slaves, their armies, and their wives; the Wounded appealed to her for help, the Unfortunate held out their hands to her: 'Do not leave us! do not leave us!' Even I myself cried: 'Do not leave us! we adore you, stay!' The flowers came forth from their seeds, surrounding her with their perfumes, which said: 'Stay!' The giant Enakim came from Jupiter, bringing Gold and his friends, bringing the spirits from the astral worlds that are connected with him, and one and all said to her: 'We will be thine for seven hundred years.' Lastly, Death alighted from his white horse, and said: 'I will obey thee!' They all prostrated themselves at her feet, and if you could have seen them! they filled the vast plain, and all cried out to her: 'We reared thee; thou art our child, do not desert us!'—Life came forth from its red waters, and said: 'I will never leave thee!' And then, as Seraphita remained silent, it gleamed like the sun, crying: 'I am the light!'—'The light is there!' cried Seraphita, pointing to the clouds where

the archangels were waving their arms; but she was tired, Desire had shattered her nerves, she could only cry: 'O my God!'—How many angelic spirits, as they climbed the mountain and were almost at the summit, have trodden upon a pebble which threw them down and hurled them back into the abyss! All those fallen spirits admired her steadfastness; they stood there, a motionless chorus, and one and all, weeping, said to her: 'Have courage!' At last, she conquered the Desire by which she had been beset in all shapes and in every guise. She knelt in prayer, and when she raised her eyes, she saw the feet of the angels flying back to heaven."

"She saw the feet of the angels?" repeated Wilfrid.

"Yes," said the old man.

"Has she been describing a dream to you?"

"A dream as real as the dream of your life," replied David; "I was there."

The old servant's calm manner impressed Wilfrid, who went away wondering if such visions were less extraordinary than those described in the writings of Swedenborg, which he had read the night before.

"If spirits really exist, they must act," he said to himself, entering the parsonage, where he found Monsieur Becker alone.

"Dear pastor," said Wilfrid, "Seraphita is allied to us only in form, and her form is impenetrable. Do not look upon me as a lunatic or a man in love: it is of no use to discuss a conviction. Transform my faith and scientific conjectures, and let us seek

enlightenment. To-morrow we will both call upon her."

"Well?" said Monsieur Becker.

"If her eye knows nothing of space," continued Wilfrid, "if her thought is a faculty of intelligent insight which enables her to embrace all things in their essence and to connect them with the general evolution of worlds; if, in a word, she knows and sees everything, let us seat the pythoness upon her tripod, let us compel that inexorable eagle to unfold her wings by threatening her! Assist me! I am breathing a fire which consumes me, I am determined either to extinguish it or to allow myself to be consumed. In short, I have discovered a victim, I propose to have her."

"It would be a very difficult conquest to accomplish," said the minister, "for the poor girl is—"

"Is?" queried Wilfrid.

"Mad," said the minister.

"I do not deny her madness, do not you deny her superiority. Dear Monsieur Becker, she has often confounded me by her erudition. Has she travelled?"

"From her house to the fiord."

"She has not been away from the place!" cried Wilfrid; "then she must have read a great deal?"

"Not a leaf, not a word! I am the only person in Jarvis who has books. The works of Swedenborg, the only books in the village, are here. She has never borrowed one of them."

"Have you ever tried to talk with her?"

“What would be the use?”

“Has no one ever lived under her roof?”

“She has had no other friends than you and Minna, no other servant than David.”

“Has she never heard of the sciences, the arts?”

“From whom?” queried the pastor.

“If she talks intelligently of all these things, as she has often talked with me, what do you think of it?”

“That the child has perhaps acquired, during several years of silence, the faculties enjoyed by Apollonius of Tyana and many alleged sorcerers who were burned by the Inquisition, as it refused to admit the existence of second-sight.”

“If she can talk Arabic, what would you think?”

“The history of medical science records several instances of girls who have spoken languages unknown to them.”

“What is to be done?” said Wilfrid. “She knows things in my past, the secret of which was known to myself alone.”

“We shall see if she can tell me certain thoughts which I have not whispered to anyone,” said the pastor.

Minna entered the room.

“Well, my child, what has become of your demon?”

“He is suffering, father,” she replied, nodding to Wilfrid. “Human passions, clad in their false splendor, encompassed him during the night and dazzled him with the incredible magnificence of their display. But you treat such things as fables.”

“Fables as fascinating to him who reads them in his brain as the *Thousand and One Nights* to the ordinary mind,” said the pastor, smiling.

“Did not Satan,” she continued, “carry the Saviour to the summit of the Temple and show him the nations at his feet?”

“The evangelists,” replied the pastor, “did not correct their proofs so well that there are not several versions of the incident in existence.”

“Do you believe in the reality of these visions?” Wilfrid asked Minna.

“Who can doubt when he describes them?”

“*He?*” queried Wilfrid. “Who?”

“He who is over yonder,” Minna replied, pointing to the château.

“Are you speaking of Seraphita?” said the stranger in amazement.

The girl hung her head, casting a mildly mischievous glance at him.

“So you also take pleasure in confusing my ideas,” said Wilfrid. “Who is she? what do you think of her?”

“What I feel is inexplicable,” replied Minna, blushing.

“You are both mad!” cried the pastor.

“Until to-morrow!” said Wilfrid.

IV

THE CLOUDS OF THE SANCTUARY

There are spectacles in which all the material splendors which man has at his disposal co-operate. Nations of slaves and divers have sought in the sands of the sea, in the bowels of high cliffs, the pearls and diamonds which adorn the audience. Handed down from generation to generation, those splendors have gleamed upon all crowned heads in succession, and could tell the most truthful of histories if they could speak. Do they not know the joys and sorrows of the great as well as the small? They have been worn everywhere: they have been worn with pride at high festivals, carried in despair to the money-lender, carried away in blood and pillage, transported into the masterpieces produced by art in order to immortalize them. Save Cleopatra's pearl, not one of them has ever been lost. The great and the fortunate are assembled to witness the coronation of a king, whose robes are the product of man's industry, but who in all his glory is clad in a purple less perfect than that of a humble wild-flower. These festivals, gorgeous with light, girt about with

music, where man's voice strives to drown the uproar,—all these triumphs of his hand are made as naught by a thought, a sentiment. The mind can assemble around man and in man more brilliant lights, can assail his ears with more melodious strains, can seat him upon the clouds of gleaming constellations which he questions: the heart can do even more! Man may meet face to face a single creature and find in a single word, in a single glance, a burden so heavy to bear, a light so dazzling, a sound so penetrating, that he gives way and kneels. The most real splendors are not in things, they are in ourselves. To the scholar a secret of science is a whole world of wonders. But is his festival accompanied by the trumpets of power, the parade of wealth, the music of joy, and an immense concourse of men? No; he goes to some dark corner, where frequently a pale and sickly man whispers a single word in his ear. That word, like a torch thrown into an underground passage, illumines the sciences for him. All human ideas, dressed in the most alluring forms mystery has invented, surrounded a blind man seated in the filth by a roadside. The three worlds,—the natural, the spiritual, and the divine,—with all their divisions, made themselves manifest to a poor Florentine exile: wherever he went, he was attended by the happy and the suffering, by those who prayed and those who wept, by angels and by the damned. When the messenger of God, omniscient and omnipotent, appeared to three of his disciples, it was at the common table of the

meanest of taverns, on a certain evening; at that moment, the light burst forth, blurred all material outlines, illumined the spiritual faculties; they beheld him in all his glory, and already the earth had no more hold upon their feet than a loosened sandal.

Monsieur Becker, Wilfrid, and Minna were conscious of a feeling of dread as they walked toward the abode of the extraordinary being whom they had agreed to interrogate. In the eyes of each of them, the Swedish château, increased in size by their imaginations, resembled a gigantic spectacle, like those in which the materials and colors are so cunningly, so harmoniously arranged by poets, and the characters, imaginary personages in the eyes of ordinary mortals, are real to those who are beginning to acquire an insight into the spiritual world. On the benches of that coliseum, Monsieur Becker placed the gray legions of doubt, its gloomy ideas, its vicious formulas for disputation; he summoned thither the different philosophical and religious worlds which are at odds with one another, and all of which appear in the guise of a gaunt and fleshless system, as Time is represented by man,—an old man who holds the scythe in one hand, and in the other carries a weak and fragile world, the human world. Wilfrid summoned thither his earliest illusions and his latest hopes; he installed there human destiny and its conflicts, religion and its triumphant domination. Minna had an indistinct vision of heaven through a cleft, love raised for her a curtain adorned with mysterious images, and the melodious strains that reached

her ears redoubled her curiosity. Thus, to these three, that evening was what the supper was to the three pilgrims in Emmaus, what a vision was to Dante, an inspiration to Homer; to them the three forms of the world were revealed, veils torn away, uncertainties banished, dark places made light. Humanity in all its phases, awaiting the light, could have been no more fully represented than by that maiden, that young man, and those two old men, one of whom was learned enough to doubt, the other ignorant enough to believe. Never was any scene more simple in appearance, more far-reaching in reality.

When they entered, ushered in by old David, they found Seraphita standing by the table, upon which were the different articles composing "a tea," a refecton which, in the North, takes the place of the joys of wine, more appropriate to southern countries. Certainly nothing in his, or her, appearance denoted a being who possessed the strange power to appear in two distinct shapes, nor was there anything to indicate the various powers which she had at her disposal. Giving her attention in the most conventional way to the comfort of her guests, she ordered David to put wood in the stove.

"Good-evening, neighbors," she said.—"My dear Monsieur Becker, I am very glad that you have come; you see me really alive for the first time, perhaps. This winter has killed me.—Pray be seated, monsieur," she said to Wilfrid.—"And do you, Minna, sit there," he continued, pointing to an easy-chair

beside the young man. "I see you have brought your embroidery; have you learned the stitch? The pattern is very pretty. For whom is it? your father or monsieur?" she said, turning to Wilfrid. "Shall we not give him, before he goes, a souvenir of the girls of Norway?"

"Were you ill again yesterday?" Wilfrid asked.

"It is nothing," was the reply. "I enjoy the suffering; it is necessary before one can leave life behind."

"Then the thought of death does not terrify you?" said Monsieur Becker, with a smile, for he did not believe that she was ill.

"No, dear pastor. There are two ways of dying: to some, death is a victory; to others, a defeat."

"Do you think that you have won the victory?" asked Minna.

"I do not know," she replied; "perhaps it will be only a step further."

The milk-white splendor of her forehead darkened, her eyes vanished behind the slowly drooping lids. The movement, simple as it was, touched and awed the three curious guests. Monsieur Becker was the boldest.

"My dear girl," he said, "you are innocence itself; but you are also endowed with divine kindness; I would ask of you this evening something more than the delicacies of your tea-table. If we are to believe certain persons, you know some extraordinary things; now, if that be so, would it not be charitable in you to dissolve some of our doubts?"

“Ah!” she rejoined, with a smile, “I walk upon the clouds, I am on the best of terms with the precipices along the fiord, the sea is a steed which I have broken to harness, I know where the flower grows that sings, where the light shines that speaks, where the flowers live and bloom that perfume the air; I have Solomon’s ring, I am a fairy; I toss my commands to the wind, which executes them like a humble slave; I discover treasures underground; I am the virgin whom the pearls fly to meet, and—”

“And we climb the Falberg without danger,” said Minna, interrupting her.

“And you, too!” replied the strange being, with a piercing glance at the girl, which filled her heart with vague anxiety.—“If I had not the power to read behind your brows the desire that brings you here, should I be what you believe me to be?” she said, enveloping them all three in her all-pervading glance, to the intense satisfaction of David, who rubbed his hands as he went from the room.—“Ah!” she continued, after a pause, “you are all impelled by a childlike curiosity. You asked yourself, my poor Monsieur Becker, if it were possible for a girl of seventeen to know one of the numberless secrets which scientists seek to discover, with their noses to the ground, instead of raising their eyes to heaven! If I should tell you how and by what the plant is connected with the animal, you would begin to doubt your own doubts. You have formed a plot to question me, have you not?”

“Yes, dear Seraphita,” replied Wilfrid; “but is it not a natural desire for men to feel?”

“Do you want to weary this child, pray?” she said, laying her hand caressingly on Minna’s hair.

The girl raised her eyes, and seemed to long to blend her whole being with Seraphita’s.

“Speech is the gift of all mankind,” said the mysterious creature, gravely. “Woe to him who should remain silent in the midst of the desert, thinking that no one could hear him: everything speaks and everything listens here below. Speech moves worlds. I wish, Monsieur Becker, to say nothing in vain. I know the difficulties which most engross your thoughts: would it not be a miracle to begin by describing the whole past of your conscience? Be it so; the miracle is about to be performed. Listen. You have never acknowledged your doubts in their full extent; I alone, steadfast in my faith, can describe them to you and make you afraid of yourself. You are on the darkest side of doubt; you do not believe in God, and everything on this earth becomes of secondary importance to him who attacks the foundation of things. Let us abandon the fruitless discussions inaugurated by false systems of philosophy. The spiritualistic generations have made no less vain efforts to deny matter than the materialistic generations have made to deny the spirit. Why these disputes? Does not man offer irrefutable proofs of both systems? are not things material and things spiritual blended in him? Only an idiot can refuse to see a fragment of

matter in the human body; upon analyzing it, your natural sciences find few differences between its organism and that of other animals. The idea to which the comparison of several objects gives birth in man no longer seems to anyone to be within the domain of matter. I am not now giving my own views—your doubts, not my certainties, are my subject. To you, as to most thinkers, the relations that you are enabled to discover between objects whose reality is attested by your sensations do not seem to you to be material.

“ Thus the natural world of things and persons is bounded in man by the supernatural world of the similarities or distinctions which he detects between the innumerable shapes of nature—relations so multiplied that they seem to be infinite; for if no man hitherto has been able even to enumerate terrestrial creations, who could enumerate their interrelations? Is not the small fraction of them with which you are acquainted to their sum total as a finite number is to infinity? At that point, you already obtain a glimpse of the infinite, which must surely enable you to conceive a purely spiritual world. Thus mankind presents a sufficient proof of the two forms, matter and spirit. In man, a visible, finite world attains completion; in him, an invisible, infinite world begins,—two worlds that do not know each other: have the stones in the fiord any knowledge of their combinations, of the colors they present to man’s eyes? do they hear the music of the waves that caress them? Let us cross, without measuring its depth, the abyss

presented by the union of a material universe and a spiritual universe, a visible, substantial, tangible creation, bounded by an invisible, unsubstantial, intangible creation; utterly unlike, separated by the great void, united by undeniable bonds of sympathy, and found in conjunction in a being who partakes of the nature of both! Let us blend together in a single world these two worlds which your philosophical systems cannot reconcile, but which are reconciled by the fact. However abstract man may deem it to be, a relation between two things necessarily implies a stamp. Where? upon what? We have not reached the point of inquiry as to how far matter may be refined. If such were the question, I do not see why He who, to make a veil for Himself, bound together by physical resemblances the stars that lie immeasurably distant from one another, could not have created thinking substances, nor why you should deny Him the power to give a body to thought!

“Thus your invisible moral universe and your visible physical universe constitute one single body. We do not separate bodies and their properties, nor objects and their relations. Whatever exists, whatever presses upon us and overwhelms us, above, below, before, or within us, whatever our eyes and our minds perceive,—all those things, named and unnamed, constitute, in order that the problem of the creation may be adapted to the measure of your logic, a finite mass of matter; if it were infinite, God would no longer be the master. According to

your view, dear pastor, however one may seek to reconcile an infinite God with that finite mass of matter, God could not exist with the attributes with which He is invested by man; if you seek Him in facts, He is of no consequence; if you seek Him in the reason, He will still be of no consequence; spiritually and materially, God becomes impossible. Let us listen to the words of human wisdom carried to their final consequences.

“When we bring God face to face with this great whole, there are but two possible methods of viewing their relations to each other. Either God and matter are contemporaneous, or God alone existed before matter. Assuming all the knowledge that has enlightened the human race since it came upon the earth to be collected in a single brain, even that gigantic brain could not conceive a third relationship unless by suppressing both God and matter. Let human philosophy pile up mountains of words and ideas, let religions accumulate images and creeds, revelations and mysteries, they must come at last to this terrible dilemma and choose between the two propositions of which it is composed; but you have not to choose: both alike lead the human mind to doubt. The problem being thus stated, of what account are spirit and matter? what matters the progress of the two worlds in one direction or the other, from the moment that the being who guides them is convicted of absurdity? What profits it to inquire whether man is advancing toward heaven or receding from it, whether creation is

ascending toward the spirit or descending toward matter, when the worlds that we question make no reply? What do theogonies and their armies signify, or theologies and their dogmas, when, no matter which of the two aspects of the problem man may choose, his God is no more? Let us glance at the first hypothesis, let us suppose God to be contemporaneous with matter. Is nothing more necessary to be God than to submit to the action or the coexistence of a substance foreign to its own? In such a system does not God become a mere secondary agent, compelled to organize matter? Who compelled Him? Who was the arbiter between His vulgar companion and Himself? Who paid that Great Artist his wages for the six days' labor attributed to Him? If there should be discovered some decisive force which was neither God nor matter, seeing that God is required to manufacture the machinery that moves the world, it would be as absurd to call that force God as to call the humble slave sent to turn a grindstone a Roman citizen.

“Moreover, we encounter a difficulty as insoluble to that supreme intellect as it is to God. To go back a little further, are we not like the Hindoos, who place the world on a tortoise and the tortoise on an elephant, but cannot tell us what the elephant's feet rest upon? Can that supreme will, resulting from the combat between God and matter, can that God greater than God have bided an eternity without decreeing what He at last decreed, assuming that eternity can be divided into two periods? No matter

where God may be, if He did not know what His subsequent thought would be, is not His intuitive intelligence an impossibility? Which of these two eternities, then, will triumph? will it be the uncreated eternity, or the created eternity? If He decreed that the world should be for all time as it is, that fresh necessity, which is quite in harmony with the conception of a sovereign intelligence, implies the coeternity of matter. Whether matter be coeternal by virtue of a divine power necessarily the same at all times, or whether it be coeternal in itself, the power of God, since it must be absolute, dies with His free will; it would find always in Him a convincing force of reasoning that would dominate it. Is nothing more necessary to be God than to be no better able to differentiate one's self from one's creation in a subsequent than in an antecedent eternity? Is that aspect of the problem insoluble as to its cause? Let us examine it in its effects.

“If it is impossible to understand God as being forced to make the world for all eternity, it is quite as impossible to understand Him in His perpetual cohesion with His work. God, compelled to live forever with His creation, is quite as degraded as in His first state of workman. Can you imagine a God who can no more be independent of His work than dependent upon it? Can He destroy it without casting reproach upon Himself? Consider, choose. If He does destroy it some day, if He never destroys it, either horn of the dilemma is fatal to the attributes without which He could not exist. Is the world an experiment, a

perishable shadow which will some day be destroyed? In that case, would not God be inconsistent and impotent? Inconsistent: for must He not have known the result before making the experiment, and why does He delay to crush what He is determined to crush? Impotent: for would He have created an imperfect world? If an imperfect creation negatives God's possession of the faculties mankind attributes to Him, let us return to the question: assume the creation to be perfect. The idea is in harmony with that of a God of sovereign intelligence who cannot have erred in anything; but in that case why the degradation? why the regeneration?

“Again, the perfect world is necessarily indestructible, it can never perish; the world neither goes forward nor recedes, it revolves in an eternal circle from which it will never deviate. Therefore God will be dependent on His work; therefore it is coeternal with Him; which brings us back to one of the propositions which attack the idea of God with the greatest force. Imperfect, the world may be supposed to advance, to improve; but, if perfect, it is stationary. If it is impossible to conceive a progressive God, who does not know the history of His creation for all time to come, is there a stationary God? is not that the triumph of matter? is it not the most momentous of all negations? In the first hypothesis, God perishes through weakness; in the second, He perishes through the *vis inertiae*. Thus, in the conception as well as in the construction of worlds, to every straightforward mind the assumption

that matter is contemporaneous with God is equivalent to a denial of God. Compelled to choose between the two branches of this problem in connection with the government of peoples, whole generations of great thinkers have chosen this. Hence the dogma of the two tenets of Magianism, which passed from Asia into Europe in the form of Satan contending with the Eternal Father. But do not that religious formula and the innumerable deifications that owe their origin to it constitute the crime of divine *lèse-majesté*? By what other name can we call the belief that puts forward as a rival to God the personification of Evil struggling forever behind the efforts of His omnipotent intelligence, with no possibility of triumph? Your statics tells you that two forces in that relative position neutralize each other.

“Will you turn to the second branch of the problem? God first existed, absolutely alone.

“Let us not repeat the foregoing arguments, which recur in all their force in connection with the division of eternity into two periods, uncreated time and created time. Let us also lay aside the questions suggested by the progress or immobility of worlds; let us be content with the difficulties inherent in this second theme. If God existed first, alone, then the world emanated from Him, then matter was produced from His essence. Let us hear no more of matter, therefore! all material forms are veils behind which the Divine Spirit lies hidden. But in that case, the world is everlasting, in that case the world is God!

Is not that proposition even more fatal than the preceding one to the attributes imputed to God by human knowledge? Can the present state of matter be explained if it came forth from God's bosom and is joined to Him forever? How can we believe that the Omnipotent, sovereignly kind in His essence and His faculties, has given birth to things which do not resemble Him, that He does not everywhere and in all respects resemble Himself? Can it be that there were some vile portions of His being which He cast off one day? a conjecture less insulting and absurd than terrible in its consequences, because it brings us back to the two principles which the preceding argument proves to be untenable. God must be ONE, He cannot be divided without renouncing the most important of His powers.

“It is impossible, therefore, to conceive a fraction of God which is not God. That hypothesis seemed so criminal to the Church of Rome that it made the presence of God in the smallest morsel of the Eucharist an article of its faith. How, then, can one conceive an omnipotent intelligence which does not triumph? How attach it, without instant triumph, to nature? And that nature searches, plans, restores, dies, and is born again; it is even more perturbed when it creates than when everything is in a state of fusion; it suffers, groans, shuts its eyes, does evil, goes astray, blots itself out, disappears, begins anew. How can we justify the almost universal misapprehension of the divine principle? Why does death exist? why was the genius of Evil, that

monarch of the earth, brought forth by a God of sovereign kindness in His essence and His faculties, who should have produced nothing that is not in conformity with Himself? But if, from this irreconcilable result, which leads us, first of all, to an absurdity, we pass to details, what end can we assign to the world? If everything is God, everything is both effect and cause; or rather there is no cause and no effect: everything is ONE like God, and you can discover no point of departure or of arrival. Can the real end be a rotation of matter in the constant process of refinement? In whatever direction it might take place, would it not be the merest child's play, the evolution of that matter that came forth from God returning to God again? Why should He vulgarize Himself? In what shape is God most godlike? Which is in the right, matter or spirit, when neither of the two can be in the wrong? Who can recognize God in that incessant toil in which He must divide Himself into two natures, one of which knows nothing, the other everything? Can you imagine God amusing Himself in human shape with His own performances, laughing at his own efforts, dying on Friday to be born again on Sunday, and continuing the jest from century to century, knowing from all eternity what the end of all things is to be? telling Himself as the creature nothing of what He does as Creator?

“The God of the second hypothesis, powerless by the force of His inertia, seems more possible, if we must choose between impossibilities, than this idiotically jesting God who fires upon Himself when two

bodies of men confront each other with arms in their hands. However absurd this extreme application of the second branch of the problem, it was adopted by half of the human race, among the nations who worshipped smiling gods. Those amorous nations were consistent: with them everything was God, even fear and its dastardly consequences, even crime and its bacchanalia. If we accept pantheism, the religion of some great human intellects, who knows where the right is then to be found? Is it with the free savage in the desert, clad in his nakedness, sublime and always just in his acts whatever they may be, listening to the sun, talking with the sea? Or is it with the civilized man who owes his greatest pleasures to falsehoods, who twists and crowds nature in order to throw a musket over his shoulder, who has abused his intellect in order to hasten the hour of his death and to invent diseases in all his pleasures? When the rake of pestilence or the ploughshare of war, when the genius of the deserts passed over a corner of the globe, destroying everything in its path, which triumphed, the Nubian savage, or the patrician of Thebes? Your doubts descend from top to bottom. They embrace everything, the end as well as the means. If the physical world seems inexplicable, the moral world proves even more against God.

“Where, then, is progress? If everything is progressing toward perfection, why do we die when children? why do not nations, at least, live forever? Is the world, the issue of God and contained in God,

stationary? Do we live but once? do we live always? If we live but once, hurried onward by the march of the Great Whole, knowledge of which has not been vouchsafed to us, let us live as we please! If we are immortal, let us swim with the tide! Can the creature be blameworthy for existing at the moment when transitions occur? If it sins at the moment of a great transformation, will it be punished after having been its victim? What are we to think of the divine goodness which does not set us down at once in the realms of happiness, if there be any such? What of God's prescience if He does not know the results of the tests to which He subjects us? What is this alternative presented to man by all religions, between boiling in an everlasting caldron and walking about in a white robe, with a palm-branch in one's hand and a halo about one's head? Can it be that that heathen invention is the last word of a true God? Moreover, what generous mind does not deem virtue prompted by self-interest unworthy of man and of God, the virtue that looks forward to an eternity of pleasure promised by all religions to him who complies for a few hours of his life with certain fantastic and often unnatural conditions? Is it not absurd to endow a man with fierce passions and to forbid him to gratify them? But of what use are these feeble objections when good and evil are equally annulled? Does evil exist? If matter in all its forms is God, then evil is God. The reasoning faculty, as well as the sentient faculty, being given to man to use, nothing can be more natural than to

seek a meaning for human sorrows and to question the future; if this straightforward, strict reasoning leads to such a conclusion, what confusion results!

“So this world has no stability: nothing goes forward, nothing pauses, everything changes and nothing is destroyed, everything returns after being restored; for, if your mind does not point out to you a definite end, it is equally impossible to point to the annihilation of the smallest particle of matter: it can change its form, but cannot destroy itself. If blind force gives the victory to the atheist, intelligent force is inexplicable; for, emanating from God, should not its triumph be instantaneous if it encounters obstacles? Where is God? If the living do not see Him, will the dead find Him? Crumble, idolatries and religions! Fall, ye too weak keystones of all the social arches that have failed to delay either the downfall, the death, or the oblivion of all nations of past time, however firmly they may have been established! Fall, ye codes of morals and of laws! our crimes are purely relative, they are divine results whose causes are unknown to us! Everything is God. Either we are God, or God is not! Old man, child of an age whose every year has placed upon your brow the hoar-frost of its incredulity, this is the sum of your learning and your long meditations. Dear Monsieur Becker, you have laid your head on the pillow of doubt, finding there the most convenient of all solutions of the problem, acting in harmony with the majority of the human race, who say to themselves: ‘Let us think no more

of the problem, inasmuch as God has not vouchsafed to grant us an algebraic formula for its solution, whereas He has granted us so many to enable us to find our way surely from the earth to the stars.' Are not those your secret thoughts? Have I evaded them? Have I not, on the contrary, set them forth clearly? Whether it be the dogma of the two basic principles,—an antagonism wherein God becomes impossible from the very fact that, being all-powerful, He condescends to contend for the supremacy,—or the absurd pantheism wherein God ceases to exist because everything is God,—those two sources whence are derived the religions for whose triumph the earth has put forth its energies are equally pernicious. Thus is the two-edged axe cast between us, the axe with which you cut off the head of that white-haired old man enthroned by you upon painted clouds. Now, the axe is mine!"

Monsieur Becker and Wilfrid glanced at each other with a sort of terror.

"Faith," continued Seraphita, in her woman's voice,—for the man had spoken hitherto,—"faith is a gift! To believe is to feel. To believe in God one must feel God. That feeling is a faculty slowly acquired by a mortal, as the marvellous powers are acquired which you admire in great men, warriors, artists, and scholars, those who know, those who produce, those who act. Thought, a union of the relations you observe between things, is a mental language which must be learned, is it not? Faith, a union of divine truths, is also a language, but

as superior to thought as thought is to instinct. That language, too, must be learned. The believer answers by a single cry, a single gesture; faith places in his hands a flaming sword with which he severs, illumines everything. The seer is not one who has come back to earth from heaven; he gazes at the sky and holds his peace. There is a creature who believes and sees, who has knowledge and power, who loves and prays and waits. Resigned, aspiring to the realms of light, that creature has neither the disdain of the believer nor the silence of the seer; it listens and replies. To it, the doubt of the dark ages is not a deadly weapon, but a guiding thread; it accepts the battle in all its forms; it adapts its tongue to all languages; it does not fly out in anger, it pities; it neither condemns nor kills anyone, it saves and comforts; it has not the bitterness of the aggressor, but the gentleness and modesty of the light that penetrates, warms, and illumines everything. In its eyes, doubt is neither impiety, blasphemy, nor a crime, but a state of transition from which man either retraces his steps toward the darkness or goes forward toward the light. Let us reason, therefore, dear pastor.

“You do not believe in God. Why? God, in your opinion, is incomprehensible, inexplicable. Agreed. I will not say to you that to understand God in His entirety would be to be God; I will not remind you that you deny what seems inexplicable to you, in order that I may claim the right to affirm the truth of what seems to me worthy of faith. It

is to you a self-evident fact of which you find the proof in yourself. In you, matter ends in knowledge; and do you think that human knowledge should end in darkness, doubt, negation? Even if God seems incomprehensible, inexplicable to you, you will at least confess that you detect in everything purely physical the hand of a consistent and sublime workman. Why should His logic stop at man, His most finished creation? If this question is not convincing, it certainly calls for some reflection. If you deny God, luckily, in order to establish your doubts, you must recognize certain double-edged facts which destroy your arguments quite as effectually as your arguments destroy God.

“We have both admitted that matter and spirit are two distinct creations which do not include each other, that the spiritual world is made up of an infinite number of abstract relations to which the finite material world gives birth; that, if no one on earth had ever been able to identify himself, by virtue of the overshadowing power of his mind, with the sum total of earthly creations, so much the more certain is it that no one could rise so high as to understand the relations which the mind observes between those creations. For instance, we might put an end to the discussion in a moment by denying you the power to understand God, just as you deny the stones in the fiord the power to see and to count themselves. Can you say that those very stones do not deny man, although he takes them to build his houses? It is a fact that crushes

you, the infinite; if you feel it within you, how can you fail to admit its consequences? can the finite have a thorough knowledge of the infinite? If you cannot grasp the relations which, by your own admission, are infinite, how will you grasp the distant purpose to which they all tend? Order, the revelation of which is one of your requirements, being infinite, can your limited reason understand it? And do not ask why man cannot understand what he can see, for he also sees what he does not understand. If I prove to you that your mind is ignorant of everything within its range, will you grant me that it is impossible for it to grasp what is beyond its range? Shall I not in that case have the right to say to you: 'One of the conditions under which God loses His cause before the tribunal of your reason must be true, the other is false; as creation exists, you feel the necessity of an end for which it exists; must not that end be a noble one?

“ ‘Now, if matter in man ends in intelligence, why will you not be content with the knowledge that the goal of human intelligence is the light of the upper spheres for which is reserved the intuitive comprehension of that God who seems to you to be an insoluble problem? The animal species below you in the scale of creation do not understand the distinction between the material and spiritual worlds, and you do; why should there not be other species above you more intelligent than yours? Before employing his energies in taking God's measure, should not man be better informed than he is about himself? Before

threatening the stars that give him light, before attacking certainties that are beyond his understanding, should he not establish the certainties that directly concern him?"—But to the negations of doubt I ought to reply by negations. Now, therefore, I ask you if there is anything here on earth sufficiently evident *in itself* for me to put faith in it? In a moment, I propose to prove to you that you believe implicitly in things which act but are not human beings, which engender thought but are not minds, in living abstractions which the understanding cannot grasp in any shape, which are nowhere, but which you find everywhere; which have no possible name, but which you have named; which, like the fleshly God whom you imagine, perish before the incomprehensible, the inexplicable, and the absurd. And I will ask you how it is that you accept these things, and reserve all your doubts for God. You believe in number, the foundation upon which you rest the edifice of those sciences which you call *exact*. Without number, no more mathematics.

“Very well; what mysterious being, even though he should be accorded the privilege of living forever, could finish naming, in what language could he name with sufficient speed, the number which would contain the infinite numbers whose existence is demonstrated to you by your mind? Ask the greatest of all human geniuses, and what reply would he make after sitting beside a table for a thousand years with his head in his hands? You know neither where number begins, nor where it stops, nor when it will end.

Here you call it time; there you call it space; nothing exists except by it; without it all creation would be a single uniform substance, for it alone differentiates and modifies. Number is to your mind what it is to matter, an incomprehensible agent. Will you make it a god? is it a human being? is it a breath emanating from God to organize the material universe, where nothing obtains its form except by virtue of the divisibility which is an effect of number? Are not the smallest as well as the vastest creations distinguished from one another by their quantities, their qualities, their dimensions, their forces, all of which are attributes to which number gives birth? The infinitude of numbers is a fact proved to your satisfaction, but of which no material proof can be given. The mathematician will tell you that infinitude of numbers exists, that it is not proved. God, dear pastor, is a number endowed with movement, which is felt, not proved, so the believer will tell you. Like unity, He is the beginning of a series of numbers with which He has nothing in common. The existence of number depends upon unity, which, while not itself a number, engenders all numbers. God, dear pastor, is a glorious unity who has nothing in common with His creations, and who, nevertheless, engenders them all. Confess, therefore, that you are as ignorant of the beginning and end of created eternity as of the beginning and end of number. Why, if you believe in number, do you deny God? Does not creation stand between the infinity of inorganic substances and the infinity of

divine spheres, just as unity stands between the infinity of fractions which you have lately begun to call decimal, and the infinity of numbers which you call integers? You alone upon earth understand number, that first step of the staircase that leads to God, and already your mind stumbles. What! you can neither measure the first abstract idea that God submits to you, nor grasp it, and yet you propose to apply your measure to God's purposes?—What would happen, pray, if I should plunge you into the abyss of motion, the force that organizes number? For instance, if I say to you that the universe is nothing but number and motion, you see that we are already speaking a different language. I understand them both, and you do not understand them. What would result, then, if I should add that motion and number are engendered by the Word? Of that Word, the supreme argument of the seers and prophets who heard long ago that breath from God beneath which Saint Paul fell, of that Word you men make sport, although all your visible works, societies, monuments, deeds, and passions proceed from your feeble word, and although, without speech, you would resemble that species of animal that so closely resembles the negro, the man-ape. Thus you firmly believe in motion and in number, an inexplicable, incomprehensible force and result, as to the existence of which I can propound the same dilemma which just now was your excuse for not believing in God. Will not you, powerful reasoner that you are, excuse me from proving to you that the infinite must be always like

itself, and that it is necessarily *one*? God alone is infinite, for surely there cannot be two infinities. If, to employ the words of men, anything whose existence is proved to you here on earth seems to you to be infinite, be certain that you are face to face with some phase of God.—Let us pass on.

“You have appropriated to yourself a place in the infinity of number, you have adapted it to your measure by creating, assuming that you can create anything, arithmetic, the foundation upon which everything rests, even your social systems. Just as number, the only thing in which your so-called atheists believe, organizes the physical creations, so does arithmetic, the handmaid of number, organize the moral world. This numeration must be absolute, like everything that is true in itself; but it is purely relative, it has no absolute existence, you can bring forward no proof of its reality. In the first place, although this numeration is clever in computing organized substances, it is impotent so far as the organizing forces are concerned, the former being finite, the latter infinite. Man, who by virtue of his intelligence conceives the existence of the infinite, could not handle it in its entirety; could he do so, he would be God. Your numeration, therefore, applied to finite things and not to infinity, is true with relation to the details, which you see, but false with relation to the whole, which you do not see.

“If nature always resembles itself in its organizing forces or in its principles of action, which are

infinite, it never does in its finite effects; thus, you will never find in all nature two identical objects; in the natural order, therefore, two and two can never make four, for, to attain that result, we must combine units that are exactly alike, and you know that it is impossible to find two leaves alike on the same tree, or two identical individuals in the same species of tree. That axiom of your numeration, false in visible nature, is false likewise in the invisible universe of your abstractions, where the same variety is found in your ideas, which are the objects of the visible world extended by their interrelations; indeed, the differences are more striking there than elsewhere. In fine, as everything there is dependent upon the temperament, the force, the morals, the habits, of individuals who never resemble one another, the slightest objects represent individual feelings. Assuredly, if man has been able to create units, he has done it by giving equal value to bits of gold of equal weight. Very well; you can add the poor man's ducat to the rich man's ducat, and say to yourself at the public treasury, that they are two equal quantities; but, in the eyes of the thinker, one of them is surely more considerable from a moral standpoint than the other; one represents a month of happiness, the other represents the most ephemeral whim. Two and two make four, therefore, only by a false and monstrous abstraction. Nor do fractions exist in nature, where what you call a fragment is a thing complete in itself; but it frequently happens, and you have proof of it, that the

hundredth part of a substance is stronger than what you would call the whole substance. If the fraction does not exist in the natural order, still less does it exist in the moral order, where ideas and feelings may be varied like the species of the vegetable order, but are always entire. The theory of fractions, therefore, is a notable instance of the obliging nature of your mind. Thus, number, with its infinitely small divisions and its infinite expansions, is a power of which but a small part is known to you, and of which the full scope escapes you. You have built yourself a cottage in the infinity of numbers, you have decorated it with hieroglyphics scientifically arranged and painted, and you exclaim: 'Everything is there!'—From pure number let us pass to the symbolized applications of number.

"Your geometry demonstrates that the straight line is the shortest distance between two points, but your astronomy demonstrates that God proceeds by curved lines alone. Thus we have two truths proved in the same science: one by the testimony of your senses sharpened by the telescope, the other by the testimony of your mind: but of these one contradicts the other. Man, who is prone to err, affirms the first, and the Maker of worlds, whom you have never detected in error, denies it. Who shall decide, then, between rectilinear geometry and curvilinear geometry? between the theory of the straight line and the theory of the curve? If, in his work, the mysterious artist, who knows how to attain his ends with marvellous celerity, employs the straight line

only to cut it at a right angle in order to obtain a curve, man himself can never rely upon it: the bullet, which man seeks to propel in a straight line, travels in a curve, and when you wish to reach a point in space with absolute certainty, you command the missile to follow its fatal parabola. Not one of your scholars has ever drawn the simple deduction that the curve is the law of the material world, the straight line of the spiritual world: that one is the theory of finite creations, the other is the theory of the infinite. Man, who alone on earth has knowledge of the infinite, alone can know the straight line; he alone has the idea of verticality in a special organ. Would not an attachment to the curve in certain men be an indication of an impurity of their nature, still wedded to the material substances which engender us; and would not the love of great minds for the straight line seem to denote in them a presentiment of heaven? Between those two lines there is an abyss, as there is between the finite and the infinite, between mind and matter, between man and the idea, between motion and the object moved, between the creature and the Creator. Ask the divine love for its wings and you may cross that abyss! Beyond, the revelation of the Word begins. Nowhere are the things you call material without depth; lines are the boundaries of solids which imply a force of action suppressed by you in your theorems, which suppression makes those theorems false as relating to bodies taken in their entirety; hence the constant destruction of all human monuments, which

you unwittingly arm with active properties. Nature deals only with bodies, your learning is simply a combining of appearances.

“So it is that nature at every step gives the lie to all your laws; can you name a single one which is not disproved by some fact? The laws of your science of statics are belabored by numberless incidents of physics, for a fluid overthrows the most solid mountains, and thus proves to you that the heaviest substances may be upraised by imponderable substances. Your laws concerning acoustics and optics are contradicted by the sounds you hear within yourselves during sleep and by the light of an electrical sun whose beams often blind you. You have no more knowledge of how light becomes intelligence in you than of the simple and natural process which changes it to ruby or sapphire or opal or emerald on the neck of an East Indian bird, while it remains gray and brown on the neck of the same bird when living under the cloudy skies of Europe, and while it remains white here, in the heart of the polar region. You cannot determine whether color is a faculty with which bodies are endowed, or whether it is an effect produced by the affusion of light. You admit the saltiness of the sea without ascertaining whether the sea is salt in its whole depth. You have acknowledged the existence of several substances which traverse what you believe to be the void; substances which are not palpable in any of the shapes affected by matter, but which place themselves in harmony with it despite all obstacles. That being so, you

believe in the results attained by chemistry, although it has as yet discovered no method of estimating the changes caused by the ebb or flow of the substances which come and go through your crystals and your machines on the intangible threads of heat or light, guided, controlled by the affinities of the metal or of the vitrified silica. You obtain only dead substances from which you have expelled the unknown force which opposes all forms of decomposition on this earth, and of which the power of attraction and cohesion, vibration and polarity, are merely phenomena.

“Life is the thought of bodies; they are simply a means of fixing it, of confining it to its path; if bodies were living beings by themselves, they would be a *cause* and would not die. When a man sets forth the results of the general movement shared by all created things in proportion to their power of absorption, you proclaim him a scholar *par excellence*, as if genius consisted in explaining what is. True genius should cast its eyes beyond effects. All your scholars would laugh if you should say to them: ‘There might be such a well-defined sympathy between two persons, one at Java, for instance, and the other here, that they would feel the same sensation at the same instant, be conscious of it, question each other, and reply without an error!’ And yet there are mineral substances which exhibit sympathy for one another at as great a distance as in the case I mention. You believe in the power of the electricity that is confined in the magnet, and you deny the

power of that which the soul sets free. According to your theory, the moon, whose influence over the tides seems to be established to your satisfaction, has no influence over the winds or vegetation or mankind; it moves the sea and eats into glass, but it must respect the sick; it has certain relations with one moiety of humanity but has no influence over the other moiety. There are your richest certainties. Let us go a little further. Do you believe in physics? But your physics begins, like the Catholic religion, with an *act of faith*. Does it not recognize an external force, distinct from matter, to which it communicates motion? You see its effects, but what is it? where is it? what is its essence, its life? has it any limits?—And you deny God!

“Thus the majority of your scientific axioms, true with relation to man, are false with relation to the great whole. Science is indivisible, and you have divided it. To ascertain the real meaning of phenomenal laws, must not one know the correlations existing between phenomena and the law of totality? In everything there is an external appearance which impresses itself upon your senses; beneath that appearance a mind is stirring; there is body and mental faculty. Where do you study the relations that bind things together? Nowhere? Have you nothing absolute, then? Your most certain theses rest upon the analysis of material forms whose spirit is constantly neglected by you. There is a lofty branch of knowledge which certain men discover too late and dare not admit it. Such men

have realized the necessity of considering bodies not only with relation to their mathematical properties, but also in their hidden affinities, in short, as a whole. The greatest man among you divined, toward the close of his life, that everything was cause and effect reciprocally; that the visible worlds bore a fixed relation to one another, and were subordinate to the invisible worlds. He deplored his previous attempt to establish absolute precepts! Counting up his worlds, like grape-seed sown in space, he explained their cohesion by the laws of planetary and molecular attraction; you did homage to that man.— Ah! I tell you that he died in despair. Assuming the centrifugal and centripetal forces, which he invented to account for the existence of the universe, to be equal, the universe would stop, and yet he admitted the existence of motion in an indeterminate sense; but, assuming those forces to be unequal, the confusion of worlds ensued at once. So that his laws were not absolute, there was a problem still more exalted than the principle upon which his false glory rests. Thus, the interrelations of the stars and the centripetal force of their internal motion prevented him from seeking the branch upon which his bunch of grapes hung. Unhappy man! the more he magnified space, the heavier his burden grew. He has told you equilibrium was established between the parts; but what became of the whole? He contemplated the vast expanse, infinite in the eyes of man, filled by those groups of worlds of which only the most minute portion is disclosed by our telescopes,

but whose immensity is made manifest by the rapid movement of light.

“That sublime contemplation enabled him to perceive infinite worlds which, planted in that expanse like flowers in a field, are born like infants, grow like youths, die like old men, live by assimilating those elements of their atmosphere which are adapted to nourish them, worlds which have a centre and a principle of life, which are protected from each other by their orbits, which, like plants, absorb and are absorbed, which compose a whole endowed with life, and having a destiny of its own. At that sight, that man trembled! He knew that life is produced by the union of the thing with its active principle, that death or inertia, weight, in short, is produced by a rupture between the thing and the motion which is peculiar to it; thereupon, he foresaw the rending asunder of those worlds if God should withdraw his Word from them. He began to search the Apocalypse for traces of that Word. You believed him mad, so mark this: he was seeking pardon for his genius.— You came, Wilfrid, to beg me to solve equations, to walk upon a rain-cloud, to plunge into the fiord and reappear as a swan. If science or miracles were the sole aim of humanity, Moses would have bequeathed to you the method of calculating fluxions, Jesus Christ would have illumined the obscurities of your sciences, His apostles would have told you the source of those endless trains of gases or metals in a state of fusion, attached to nuclei, which whirl about in order to solidify, seeking a resting-place in

the ether, and which sometimes force their way violently into a planetary system when they come in contact with a star, turn it from its course, and shatter it by the shock, or destroy it by the infiltration of their deadly gases. Instead of helping you to live in God, Saint Paul would have explained that food is the secret bond of all forms of creation and the visible bond of all animate beings.

“To-day, the greatest miracle would be to find the square equal to the circle, a problem which you deem impossible, but which is undoubtedly solved in the onward march of worlds by the intersection of some mathematical line whose involutions are visible to the eye of spirits who have reached the upper spheres. Believe me, miracles are within us, not without. Thus did the natural facts come to pass which the peoples of old thought supernatural. Would not God have been unfair to manifest His power to some generations and withhold its manifestations from others? The rod of brass belongs to one and all. Neither Moses, nor Jacob, nor Zoroaster, nor Paul, nor Pythagoras, nor Swedenborg, nor the most obscure messengers, nor the most glorious prophets of God attained a greater height than you may attain. But for nations there are hours when they have faith. If material knowledge is to be the goal of human efforts, tell me, would societies, those great homes where men have been wont to assemble, be always providentially dispersed? If civilization were the aim of the human race, would intelligence perish? would it remain

purely an individual attribute? The grandeur of all nations that have been great was based upon exceptions; when there ceased to be exceptions, the grandeur vanished. Would not the seers, the prophets, the messengers of God, have turned their hands to knowledge, instead of resting them on faith? would they not have knocked at the door of your brains, instead of appealing to your hearts? They all came to urge the nations toward God; they all proclaimed the blessed path by saying to you the simple words that lead to the kingdom in the skies; all, aflame with love and faith, all, inspired by that Word which hovers over nations, encompasses them, revivifies them, and lifts them up, employed it to serve no human interest. Your great geniuses, poets, kings, scholars, have been swallowed up with their cities, and the desert has wrapped them once more in its cloaks of sand; while the names of those good shepherds are still blessed and survive every disaster. We cannot agree upon any point. We are separated by yawning chasms; you are on the side of darkness, and I live in the true light. Are these the words that you wished to hear? I say them joyfully, for they may work a change in you. Understand that there are sciences of mind as well as sciences of matter. Where you see bodies, I see forces which tend toward one another by virtue of an impulse of generation. To my mind, the character of a body is the index to its elements and the symbol of its properties. Those elements give birth to affinities which escape your notice, but which

are connected with certain centres. The different species among which life is distributed are never-failing sources which correspond among themselves. To each its special product. Man is effect and cause; he is nourished, but he also nourishes.

“By calling God the Creator, you belittle Him; He did not create, as you believe, either the plants or the animals or the stars; could He proceed by diverse methods? did He not act on the sole principle of unity of composition? Thus He created elements which should develop according to His general law, at the pleasure of the surroundings in which they happened to be placed. Thus a single substance, and motion; a single plant, a single animal, but constant relations. In fine, all the affinities are connected by points of similarity, and the life of the worlds is drawn toward fixed centres by a famished aspiration, just as you are all impelled by hunger to seek food. To give you an example of affinities connected by similarities,—a secondary law upon which all creations of your thought repose,—music, a celestial art, is an application of that principle; is it not a blending of sounds harmonized by number? Is not sound a modification of the air, by compression, expansion, reverberation? You know the composition of the air: nitrogen, oxygen, and carbon. As you can obtain no sound in a vacuum, it is clear that music and the human voice are the result of the union of organized chemical substances with the same substances prepared within you by your mind, and harmonized by means of light, the great source

of nutriment to your globe; have you ever contemplated the masses of nitre deposited by the snow, have you ever looked upon the lightning-flash and the plants inhaling the metals which they assimilate, without forming the conclusion that the sun melts and distributes the subtle essence that nourishes everything on this earth? As Swedenborg said: *The earth is a man!* Your present-day learning, which makes you great in your own eyes, is paltry stuff compared with the floods of light with which the seers are surrounded. Cease, cease to question me, our languages are not the same. I have used yours for a moment in order to cast a gleam of faith into your souls, to give you a skirt of my cloak, and lead you to the beautiful regions of prayer. Is it for God to stoop to your level? is it not your duty to rise to Him? If human reason has so soon exhausted its strength, placing God at the top of its ladder so that it might see Him, but failing to reach Him, is it not evident that we must seek some other path to obtain a knowledge of Him? That path is in ourselves. The seer and the believer find within them eyes more piercing than the eyes they apply to earthly things, and they descry the dawn. Listen to this truth: your most exact sciences, your boldest meditations, your brightest gleams of intelligence, are clouds. Above is the sanctuary whence the true light gushes forth."

She sat down and ceased to speak, but her placid features gave not the slightest indication of the

excitement orators feel after their least vehement extempore harangues.

"Who told her all that?" Wilfrid whispered in Monsieur Becker's ear.

"I do not know," he replied.

"He was pleasanter on the Falberg," said Minna to herself.

Seraphita passed her hand over her eyes, and said with a smile:

"You are very thoughtful this evening, gentlemen. You treat Minna and myself like men to whom you can talk politics and business, whereas we are two girls to whom you ought to tell pretty stories while we drink our tea, as the custom is in Norway.—Come, Monsieur Becker, tell me some of the *saga* that I don't know. Tell me the *saga* of Frithiof, that story which you believe so implicitly, and which you promised to tell me. Tell us about the peasant's son who owned a ship that had a soul and could talk. I dream of the frigate *Ellida*! Wasn't that the name of the fairy with sails upon which young girls were supposed to sail?"

"As we have come back to Jarvis once more," said Wilfrid, whose eyes were fixed upon Seraphita as the eyes of a robber crouching in the shadow glare at the spot where the treasure lies, "tell me why you do not marry?"

"You are all born widows or widowers," she replied; "but my marriage was arranged when I was born, and I am betrothed—"

"To whom?" they all asked at once.

"Let me keep my secret," said she. "I promise, if our father is willing, to invite you to my mysterious nuptials."

"Will they be soon?"

"I am waiting."

A long silence followed her last words.

"The springtime has come," said Seraphita; "the uproar of the rushing waters and the breaking ice is beginning; will you not come and salute the first springtime of a new century?"

She rose, followed by Wilfrid, and they walked together to a window which David had opened. After the long silence of winter, the mighty waters were stirring beneath the ice and roaring in the fiord like loud music; for there are sounds which distance purifies, and which reach the ear like waves of light and of refreshing coolness.

"Cease, Wilfrid, cease to give utterance to evil thoughts whose triumph would be a heavy burden for you to bear. Who could not read your desires in the gleam of your eyes? Be noble, bend your steps toward the good! is it not going far beyond the *love* of men to sacrifice one's self entirely to the happiness of the person whom one loves? Obey me and I will lead you into a path where you will obtain all the grandeurs of which you dream, and where love will be truly infinite."

She left Wilfrid lost in thought.

"Is this sweet creature really the prophetess whose eyes a moment since shot fire, who talked in thunder tones about the different worlds, whose

hand brandished the axe of doubt against our sciences? Have we just waked up?" he said to himself.

"Minna," said Seraphitus, returning to the minister's daughter, "the eagles fly where the dead bodies are, the doves to the living springs, to the green and peaceful shade. The eagle soars aloft, the dove descends. Cease to risk your welfare in a region where you will find neither springs nor shade. If, but recently, you were unable to look into the abyss without being overcome, keep your strength for the man who will love you. My poor girl, I have my own betrothed, as you know."

Minna rose and went with Seraphitus to the window where Wilfrid was. All three listened to the Sieg rushing down under the pressure of the higher streams which were already uprooting trees caught in the ice. The fiord had recovered its voice. The illusions were dissipated. They all gazed in admiration at the spectacle of nature throwing off her fetters, and, as it were, replying with a sublime outburst of melody to the spirit whose voice had just awakened her.

When the mysterious creature's three guests left her, they were filled with that vague sensation which is neither somnolence nor torpor nor amazement, but which resembles all of these; which is neither the twilight nor the dawn, but which makes one thirsty for light. All were thinking deeply.

"I begin to believe that she is a spirit disguised in human form," said Monsieur Becker.

ON THE SHORE OF THE SIEG

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Minna rose and went with Seraphitus to the window. There William was sitting, his head bowed, his hands clasped, his eyes fixed on the floor. Siew rushing down under the pressure of the higher streams which were already uprooting trees caught in the ice. The field had recovered its voice. The waves were dissipated. They all gazed in admiration at the spectacle of nature throwing off her fetters, and, as it were, replying with a sublime outburst of melody to the spirit of love which had just awakened her.

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ishment at the spectacle.



Wilfrid, once more in his own apartment, in calm and determined mood, did not know how to contend with forces of such majesty and diversity.

Minna said to herself :

“ Why will he not let me love him ? ”

V

THE FAREWELLS

There is in man a phenomenon perplexing beyond measure to the meditative minds which seek to discover a meaning in the onward march of societies and to establish laws of progression for the movement of the human intellect. However momentous a fact may be, and—if supernatural facts could exist—however solemn and impressive a miracle performed in public might be, the lightning-flash of that fact, the thunder of that miracle, would be swallowed up in the moral ocean, whose surface, hardly roughened by a swiftly passing commotion, would at once resume the level of its usual fluctuations.

Does the voice pass through the animal's jaws to make itself heard more distinctly? Does the hand write upon the walls of the banqueting-hall where the court disports itself? Does the eye illumine the king's sleep? Does the prophet come to explain dreams? Does death, when summoned, rear its head in the luminous regions where the faculties live again? Does the spirit stamp out matter at the foot of the mystic ladder of the seven spiritual worlds which rest one upon another in space and make

themselves manifest by the waves of light which fall in cascades upon the steps of the celestial court? However deep the interior revelation, however visible the exterior revelation, on the morrow Balaam doubts his ass and himself; Balthazar and Pharaoh require the Word to be explained by two prophets, Moses and Daniel. The spirit comes, bears man away above the earth, divides seas for him, and lets him see their depths, shows him the places that have disappeared, reanimates for him the dried bones which fill the great valley with their powder: the Apostle writes the Apocalypse! Twenty centuries later human knowledge confirms the Apostle and translates his images into axioms. What matters it! the mass continues to live as it lived yesterday, as it lived in the first Olympiad, as it lived on the day after the Creation or the day before the great catastrophe. Doubt covers everything with its waves. The same waves beat with the same movement upon the human granite that acts as the boundary of the ocean of intelligence. After asking himself if he saw what he saw, if he heard aright the words that were spoken, if the fact were a fact, if the idea were an idea, man resumes his former course, turns his mind to his business, obeys some slave or other who follows death, yields to forgetfulness, which covers with its black cloak a former race of which the new race has no remembrance. Man does not cease to move, to go forward, to grow like a vegetable, until the day when the axe strikes him down. If that power of the waves, if that

constant pressure of the bitter waters prevents all progress, doubtless it forestalls death also. Among men of superior mould, only those minds which are prepared for faith descry Jacob's mystic ladder.

After listening to the words in which Seraphita, being questioned with such solemnity, had set forth the vast compass of the divine power, as an organ fills a church with its moaning and discloses the musical universe, bathing the most inaccessible arches in its solemn sounds, playing, like the light, among the most graceful decorations of the capitals, Wilfrid betook himself to his own apartment, dismayed by having seen the world in ruins, and above those ruins waves of light of strange brilliancy pouring from the hands of that girl. The next day, his mind was still filled with the subject, but his terror was allayed; he did not feel that he was himself destroyed or changed: his passions, his ideas, awoke refreshed and vigorous. He went to breakfast with Monsieur Becker, and found him seriously absorbed in the *Treatise upon Incantations*, which he had been looking over all the morning in order that he might be able to reassure his guest. With the childlike good faith of the student, the minister had turned down the pages on which Jean Wier cited authentic instances which demonstrated the possibility of the events of the preceding night; for, in the eyes of learned doctors, an idea is an event, just as the most momentous events hardly attain the dignity of an idea. At the fifth cup of tea that the two philosophers drank together, the mysterious

evening became quite natural. The celestial truths were arguments of greater or less strength, and susceptible of examination. Seraphita seemed to them to be a young woman of considerable oratorical power; due credit must be given to her fascinating voice, to her seductive beauty, to her graceful gestures, to all those oratorical arts by the use of which an actor expresses in a single sentence a whole world of sentiments and thoughts, while in reality the sentence is often most commonplace.

"Bah!" said the worthy minister, with a philosophical grimace, as he spread a layer of butter on his bread, "the solution of such lovely enigmas is six feet underground."

"Nevertheless," said Wilfrid, sugaring his tea, "I cannot understand how a girl of sixteen can know so many things, for her speech bristles with facts tightly compressed as in a vise."

"Why," said the minister, "just read the story of this young Italian girl, who knew forty-two languages, ancient and modern, at the age of twelve; and the story of this monk who could divine people's thoughts by the sense of smell! In Jean Wier and a dozen other treatises which I will give you to read, there are a thousand proofs for one."

"Even so, dear pastor; but to my mind Seraphita would be a divine creature to have for one's own."

"She is all intellect," replied Monsieur Becker, doubtfully.

Several days passed, during which the snow in the valleys melted by slow degrees; the green leaves

in the forest peeped out like new grass, the Norwegian landscape prepared its finery for its nuptials of a day. During that brief period when the mildness of the air made life possible out-of-doors, Seraphita remained in solitude. Wilfrid's passion was intensified by the irritation caused by the proximity of a beloved woman who does not appear. When that indescribable creature received Minna, Minna detected the ravages of an internal fire: her voice had become hollow, her complexion was beginning to fade; and, whereas poets would hitherto have compared its dazzling whiteness to the brilliancy of the diamond, it had now the splendor of the topaz.

"Have you seen her?" said Wilfrid, who was prowling around the Swedish château awaiting Minna's return.

"We are going to lose *him*," replied the girl, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Mademoiselle," cried the stranger, restraining the volume of voice to which anger impels one, "do not make sport of me! You can love Seraphita only as one girl loves another, not with the love with which she inspires me. You do not know what danger you would incur if my jealousy were justly aroused. Why can I not go to her? Is it you who invent obstacles?"

"I do not know by what right you probe my heart thus," replied Minna, calm externally, but in reality terribly frightened. "Yes, I love him," she continued, recovering the courage of her convictions in order to confess the religion of her heart. "But

my jealousy, the natural attendant of love, fears no one here. Alas! I am jealous of a hidden sentiment which engrosses his thoughts. Between him and me there is a space which I know not how to cross. I would that I knew whether the stars or I love him the more dearly, which of us would endure self-sacrifice more speedily for his happiness? Why should I not be at liberty to declare my affection? In presence of death, we can avow our preferences, and, monsieur, Seraphitus is dying!"

"You are mistaken, Minna; the siren whom I have so often bathed with my desires, who submitted to my admiration as she reclined coquettishly upon her divan, graceful, weak, and melancholy, is not a young man."

"Monsieur," replied Minna, wistfully, "he whose powerful hand guided me over the Falberg to the *sæler* yonder, sheltered by the Ice-Cap," she said, pointing to the highest point of the mountain, "is surely not a weak girl. Ah! if you had heard him prophesying! His poetry was the music of thought. A young girl could not have commanded the deep tones of voice that moved my very soul."

"But what certainty have you—" said Wilfrid.

"None, save that of the heart," replied Minna in confusion, hastily interrupting him.

"Well, I," cried Wilfrid, darting at Minna the terrifying glance of the desire and passion that kill—"I, who know how powerful is my self-control, will prove your error to you."

At the moment when words were thronging to

Wilfrid's tongue as rapidly as ideas were massing in his brain, he saw Seraphita coming from the Swedish château, followed by David. Her appearance allayed his excitement.

"Look," he said, "only a woman can show such grace, such pliancy of movement."

"He is ill, he is walking out for the last time," said Minna.

David withdrew at a sign from his mistress, as Wilfrid and Minna went to meet her.

"Let us go to the falls of the Sieg," she said to them, voicing an invalid's longing of the sort that one hastens to gratify.

A light white mist shrouded the valleys and the mountains; the peaks, gleaming like stars, pierced it and gave it the aspect of a moving milky-way. The sun appeared through that earthly smoke like a globe of red-hot iron. Despite these last gambols of winter, occasional puffs of warm air, laden with the perfume of the birch, already arrayed in its white buds, and with the odors exhaled by the larches whose silken tufts appeared once more—breezes heated by the incense and sighing of the earth announced the beautiful springtime of the North, a brief outburst of joy on the part of the most melancholy of natures. The wind was beginning to raise the veil of clouds that partly concealed the gulf. The birds were singing. The bark on the trees, where the sun had not yet dried the paths made by the frost, which trickled down in murmuring streams, enlivened the landscape with its fantastic appearance. They walked

in silence along the shore. Wilfrid and Minna alone gazed at that spectacle, magic in its beauty to them who had grown weary of the monotonous picture of that country-side in winter. Their companion was pensive, as if he were trying to distinguish some one voice in that concert of nature. They reached the verge of the cliffs between which the Sieg empties into the fiord, at the end of the long avenue lined with venerable firs which the torrent had cut for itself in an undulating line through the forest, a path with an arched ceiling strongly ribbed, as in cathedrals. From that point, the fiord was visible in its entire length, and the open sea sparkled on the horizon like a steel blade.

At that moment, the mist vanished, and disclosed the blue sky. On all sides, in the valleys, around the trees, glistening particles still flew hither and thither, like diamond-dust swept up by a fresh breeze, superb catkins of drops hanging in pyramids at the ends of twigs. The mountain torrent roared above them. From its surface arose a vapor tinged with all the diverse shades of light by the sun, whose rays, dissolved into their elements, formed shafts of light in the seven colors, sending forth the flames of innumerable prisms whose reflections crossed and recrossed in every direction. That wild quay was carpeted by several varieties of lichen, a lovely material made lustrous by the dampness, and figured like a magnificent silk hanging. Heather already in flower crowned the cliffs with its artfully blended garlands. All the slender branches, attracted by the

cool vapor from the stream, drooped their head-dresses of foliage; the larches waved their lacelike leaves, caressing the pines, which stood as motionless as thought-worn old men. That luxuriant array had a fitting contrast in the solemnity of the venerable colonnades presented by the forests on the mountains and in the broad expanse of the fiord, spread out at the feet of the three spectators, in which the torrent drowned its frenzy. And last of all, the sea was the frame of that page written by the greatest of poets, Chance, to whom we owe the lack of order in the creation, which seems to have been left to its own devices. Jarvis was a mere speck in that landscape, in that immensity, sublime like everything which, having but an ephemeral life, presents a swiftly-passing image of perfection; for in accordance with a law, fatal in our eyes only, creations which seem finished, the favorites of our hearts and our glances, have only a springtime here. On the summit of that cliff, those three might justly believe themselves alone in the world.

“What a gorgeous sight!” cried Wilfrid.

“Nature has her hymns,” said Seraphita. “Is not this music delicious? Confess, Wilfrid, that none of the women you have known has ever created such a beautiful retreat as this. Here I am conscious of a feeling rarely inspired by the sight of cities, a feeling that would lead me to lie for an indefinite time amid this grass that grows so rapidly. Lying there, with eyes fixed on the sky, with open heart, lost in the bosom of the boundless expanse, I would

listen to the sigh of the flower which is no sooner free from its primitive covering than it would try to run, and to the cries of the eider-duck, impatient for naught but wings, remembering the longings of man, who resembles them all, and who, like them, desires! But this is woman's poetry, Wilfrid! You descry a voluptuous suggestion in that misty liquid expanse, in those embroidered veils in which nature disports herself like a coquettish bride, and in this atmosphere wherein she perfumes her green tresses for her nuptials. You would like to distinguish the shape of a naiad in yonder vapory gauze, and, in your view, I ought to listen to the masculine voice of the torrent."

"Is not love there, like a bee among the petals of a flower?" replied Wilfrid, who, detecting traces of an earthly feeling in her for the first time, deemed the moment favorable to give expression to his effervescent passion.

"Again?" laughed Seraphita, whom Minna had left alone.

She was climbing a cliff on which she had spied blue saxifrage.

"Again!" echoed Wilfrid. "Listen to me," he said, with an uncompromising glance which encountered a sort of adamant armor, "you know not what I am, what my power is, and what my will. Do not reject my last prayer! Be mine for the welfare of the world, which is so dear to your heart! Be mine, that I may have a pure conscience, that a divine voice may ring in my ear inspiring me

aright in the vast enterprise which I have resolved to undertake, impelled by my hatred of the nations of the earth, but which I would accomplish for their good if you bear me company. What more noble mission could you give to love? of what nobler rôle can a woman dream? I came to this country meditating a momentous project."

"And you will sacrifice its grandeurs," she said, "to an innocent maiden, whom you will love, and who will lead you into the paths of peace."

"What do I care? I want none but you!" he replied, resuming his discourse. "This is my secret. I have travelled through the whole North, that great workshop where the new races are forged which spread over the earth like human streams whose function it is to revivify superannuated civilization. I wished to commence my work at some point in these latitudes, to win for myself there the empire which force and intelligence enable one to obtain over a wandering tribe, to train it to fight, to make war, to spread it abroad like a conflagration, to swallow up Europe, crying liberty here, pillage there, glory to one, pleasure to another; but meanwhile I myself, like the figure of Destiny, implacable and cruel, would stalk onward like the tempest which assimilates all the elements in the atmosphere of which the lightning is composed, and fatten myself upon mankind like an insatiable scourge. Thus I should have conquered Europe at a time when it is awaiting the new Messiah who is to lay waste the world in order to reconstruct its social systems. Europe will

no longer believe in anybody save the man who tramples her under his feet. Some day poets and historians would have justified my life, would have magnified my fame, would have imputed exalted ideas to me,—me to whom that immense jest, written in blood, is vengeance pure and simple. But, dear Seraphita, what I have seen has disgusted me with the North, strength here is too blind, and I thirst for the Indies! A duel with a conceited, cowardly, mercenary government is far more attractive to me. And then, too, it is easier to excite the imagination of nations sitting at the foot of the Caucasus than to convince the mind of the ice-bound countries where we are. I am tempted, therefore, to cross the Russian steppes, to reach the borders of Asia, to sweep over it as far as the Ganges with my triumphant human inundation, and there I will overthrow the English power. Seven men have already carried out this scheme at different times. I will renew the triumphs of art as the Saracens did when Mahomet turned them loose on Europe. I will be no paltry king like those who to-day govern the former provinces of the Roman Empire, disputing with their subjects over tariffs. No, nothing shall arrest the lightning of my glances or the tempest of my speech! My feet shall cover a third of the globe, like those of Genghis-Khan; my hand shall grasp Asia as Aurungzebe's once grasped it. Be my companion, take your seat, O fair and lovely creature, on a throne. I have never felt a doubt of my success—be thou in my heart and I shall be sure of it!"

"I have already reigned," said Seraphita.

Those words were like the blow of an axe dealt by a skilful woodsman at the foot of a sapling which instantly falls. Only men can understand the frenzy a woman arouses in a man's heart, when, as he strives to demonstrate to her his strength or his power, his talents or his superior genius, the capricious creature puts her head on one side and says: "That is nothing!" when she smiles with a *blasé* air and says: "I know all that!" when, to her mind, strength is pettiness.

"What!" cried Wilfrid in desperation, "the glories of art, the treasures of the world, the splendors of a court—"

She stopped him by a single movement of her lips, and said:

"Beings more powerful than you are have offered me more."

"Then you can have no heart, if you are not attracted by the prospect of being the solace of a great man who will sacrifice everything to live with you in a little house on the shore of a lake."

"But," said she, "I am loved with a love that knows no bounds."

"By whom?" cried Wilfrid, rushing frantically toward Seraphita, to hurl her into the foamy cascade of the Sieg.

She looked at him, his arm fell by his side; she pointed to Minna, who was running toward them, all pink and white, and pretty as the flowers she held in her hand.

“Child!” said Seraphitus, going to meet her.

Wilfrid remained at the summit of the cliff, motionless as a statue, lost in his thoughts, longing to be whirled away by the rushing waters of the Sieg like one of the uprooted trees that passed before his eyes and disappeared in the bosom of the gulf.

“I picked them for you,” said Minna, presenting her nosegay to the adored one. “One of them, this one,” she continued, selecting a flower, “is like the one we found on the Falberg.”

Seraphitus gazed at the flower and at Minna in turn.

“Why do you say that to me? do you doubt me?”

“No,” said the girl, “my trust in you is infinite. While you are in my eyes lovelier than this lovely scene, you also seem to me more learned than the whole human race. When I saw you, I thought that I had been praying to God. I would like—”

“What?” said Seraphitus, glancing at the girl with an expression which disclosed to her the vast gulf that lay between them.

“I would like to suffer in your stead.”

“This is the most dangerous of mortal creatures,” said Seraphitus to himself. “O my God, can it be a criminal thought to long to present her to thee?—Have you forgotten already what I told you up yonder?” he said aloud, addressing the maiden and pointing to the peak of the Ice-Cap.

“Now he has become terrible again,” said Minna to herself, shuddering with dread.

The voice of the Sieg accompanied the thoughts of

the three, who remained for some moments on a jutting platform of rock, together in the flesh, but separated by fathomless abysses in the spiritual world.

“Oh! Seraphitus, teach me,” said Minna in a voice as silvery as a pearl, and as timid as the movement of sensitive plants. “Teach me what I must do in order not to love you. Who would not admire you? love is admiration which never grows weary.”

“Poor child!” said Seraphitus, turning pale, “one can love only a single being in that way.”

“Who?” demanded Minna.

“You shall know,” he replied in the feeble voice of a man about to lie down and die.

“Help! he is dying!” cried Minna.

Wilfrid ran to them, and, seeing that strange being lying gracefully on a fragment of gneiss, whereon time had cast its cloak of velvet, its glossy lichens, its yellow mosses which shone like satin in the sun, he said:

“She is very lovely!”

“This is the last glance I shall be able to bestow upon nature in travail,” she said, summoning all her strength to rise.

She walked to the edge of the cliff from which she could embrace the whole of that grand and sublime landscape, but lately buried beneath a tunic of snow, now bedecked with flowers, verdant and full of life.

“Farewell,” she said, “dear spot, burning with love, where everything rushes ardently from centre to extremities, and whose extremities assemble like

the hairs upon a woman's head, to form the strange tress by which thou dost attach thyself, in the invisible ether, to the divine thought!

"Do you see the man who, bending over a furrow watered with his sweat, rises a moment to question the sky; the woman calling her children to refresh them with her milk; the sailor handling the ropes in the wildest fury of the storm; the woman sitting in the hollow of a rock awaiting the father? do you see all those who stretch out their hands after a life consumed in thankless toil? To all, peace and courage! to all, farewell!

"Do you hear the cry of the soldier dying unknown, the outcry of the man betrayed, weeping in the desert? To all, peace and courage! to all, farewell! Farewell, ye who die for the kings of earth! But farewell, too, ye peoples without a fatherland, ye lands without peoples, who long each for the other! Above all, farewell to thee, O sublime exile, who knowest not where to rest thy head! Farewell, dear innocents, drawn by wild horses for having loved too well! Farewell, ye mothers sitting beside your dying sons! Farewell, ye sainted wounded women! Farewell, ye poor! Farewell, ye small and weak and sickly, whose sorrows I have so often made mine own! Farewell, all ye who wander in the sphere of instinct, suffering for others!

"Farewell, ye navigators who seek the east through the dense shadows of your abstractions, vast as elemental principles! Farewell, ye martyrs of thought, whom thought leads to the true

light! Farewell, ye studious spheres where I hear the lament of the insulted genius, the sigh of the scholar whose knowledge comes too late!

“This is the angelic concert, the perfume-laden breeze, the incense of the heart exhaled by those who go about praying, comforting, instilling the divine light and the celestial balm into depressed souls. Courage, choir of love! Ye, to whom the nations cry: ‘Comfort us! defend us!’ courage and farewell!

“Farewell, granite, thou shalt become a flower; farewell, flower, thou shalt become a dove; farewell, dove, thou shalt be woman; farewell, woman, thou shalt be suffering; farewell, man, thou shalt be faith; farewell, ye who shall be all love and prayer!”

Prostrated by fatigue, the mysterious being leaned for the first time upon Wilfrid and Minna to return home. Thereupon, Wilfrid and Minna felt that they were attacked by a strange contagion. They had taken but a few steps when David appeared, weeping:

“She is dying, why did you bring her so far?” he cried in the distance.

The old man, renewing his youthful strength, took Seraphita in his arms and flew to the gate of the Swedish château, like an eagle carrying a snow-white lamb to his eyrie.

VI

THE PATH TO HEAVEN

On the day following that on which Seraphita foretold her own death and bade farewell to earth as a prisoner looks about his dungeon before leaving it forever, she suffered pains that compelled her to remain in the state of absolute rest imposed upon those who are afflicted with the most grievous ills. Wilfrid and Minna went to see her, and found her reclining on her fur-covered divan. Her soul, still veiled by the flesh, shone through that veil, making it whiter and whiter day by day. The onward march of the spirit, undermining the last barrier that separated it from the infinite, was called a disease, the hour of true life was named death. David wept to see his mistress suffer, refusing to listen to her words of consolation; the old man was as unreasonable as a child. Monsieur Becker urged Seraphita to take medicine; but his efforts were fruitless.

One morning, she asked for the two beings whom she had loved, sending word to them that that day was the last of her bad days. Wilfrid and Minna came in deadly alarm; they knew that they were about to lose her. Seraphita smiled on them after the manner

of those who are going to a better world, she bent her head like a flower too heavily laden with dew, showing its petals for the last time and giving to the air its last fragrance; she gazed at them with a feeling of melancholy inspired by them, she no longer thought of herself, and they were conscious of it but were unable to express their sorrow, with which gratitude was blended. Wilfrid stood silent, motionless, absorbed in one of those reveries induced by things whose vast scope enables us to comprehend the existence of supreme immensity even on earth. Emboldened by the weakness of that powerful creature, or perhaps by the fear of losing her forever, Minna stooped over her and said :

“ Seraphitus, let me go with you?”

“ Can I forbid you?”

“ Why do you not love me enough to remain?”

“ I could not love anybody here on earth.”

“ Whom do you love?”

“ Heaven.”

“ Are you worthy of heaven when you thus despise God’s creatures?”

“ Minna, can we love two persons at once? Would your beloved be your beloved if he did not fill your heart? Must he not be the first, the last, the only one? Does not she who is all love leave the world for her well-beloved? Her entire family becomes a memory, she has but one relative, him! Her heart is no longer hers, but his! If she keeps in her heart anything that is not his, she does not

love; no, she does not love! Is it to love at all, to love feebly? The words of her well-beloved fill her soul with joy and flow through her veins in a purple flood of a richer hue than blood; his glance is a light which penetrates her being, she becomes one with him; where he is, there everything is beautiful. He warms the heart, he illumines everything; by his side is it ever cold or dark? he is never absent, he is always in us, we think in him, of him, for him. That is how I love, Minna."

"Love whom?" said Minna, attacked by a consuming jealousy.

"God," replied Seraphitus, whose voice shone bright in their souls like beacon-fires glowing from mountain to mountain. "God, who never betrays us! God, who does not abandon us and constantly fulfils our desires, who alone can always slake the thirst of His creature with infinite, unalloyed joy! God, who is never weary and does naught but smile! God, who, always new, casts His treasures into the soul, who purifies and knows not bitterness, who is all harmony and all flame! God, who places Himself within our hearts to blossom there, grants all our desires, does not parley with us when we are His, but gives Himself absolutely, gives us new life, amplifies us, multiplies us in Himself! In fine, GOD! Minna, I love you because you may be His! I love you, because, if you come to Him, you will be mine."

"Then lead me," she replied, kneeling. "Take my hand, I will never leave you."

“Lead us, Seraphita!” cried Wilfrid, kneeling impetuously at Minna’s side. “Yes, you have made me thirsty for the light and thirsty for the Word; I am parched with the love you have planted in my heart, I will preserve your soul in mine; let me know your will, I will do what you bid me do. If I cannot obtain you, I wish to retain all the sentiments which you may communicate to me! If I can bind myself to you only by my unaided strength, I will cling to you as the fire clings to what it consumes. Speak!”

“Angel!” cried the incomprehensible creature, enveloping them both in a glance which was like a cloak of azure,—“Angel, heaven shall be thy heritage!”

A long silence followed that exclamation, which echoed in Wilfrid’s soul and Minna’s like the first strain of some celestial melody.

“If you would accustom your feet to walk in the path that leads to heaven, understand that its early stages are hard,” said that suffering soul. “God wishes to be sought for Himself. In that sense He is jealous, He wishes you to be absolutely His; but, when you have given yourself to Him, He never abandons you. I purpose to leave with you the keys of the kingdom where His light shines, where you will be always in the bosom of the Father, in the heart of the Bridegroom. No sentinel guards the approaches, you can enter at any point; His palace, His treasures, His sceptre, nothing is guarded; He has said to all: ‘Take them!’ But

one must feel the desire to go thither. It is necessary to leave one's home as if for a journey, to renounce one's plans, to bid farewell to one's friends, one's father, mother, sister, and even to the smallest brother who cries aloud, to bid them all farewell forever, for you will no more return than the martyrs who set out for the stake returned to their firesides; in a word, you must cut loose from the sentiments and objects to which men cling; otherwise you would not be wholly devoted to your enterprise. Do for God what you would do for your own ambitious designs, what you do when you devote yourself to an art, what you did when you loved a mortal more dearly than Him, or when you were in pursuit of some secret of human science. Is not God science itself, love itself, the source of all poesy? May not His treasure arouse cupidity? His treasure is inexhaustible, His poesy is infinite, His love is immutable, His knowledge is infallible and free from mystery! Cling to nothing, therefore, He will give you everything. Yes, you will find in His heart treasures incomparably greater than the earthly treasures you may have lost. This that I tell you is certain: you will have His power, you will use it as you use what belongs to your lover or your mistress. Alas! the majority of men doubt, lack faith, will, perseverance. Although some may set out, they at once begin to look behind them and retrace their steps. Few mortals know how to choose between those two extremes: to remain or to go, the mire or heaven. Everyone hesitates. Weakness

is the beginning of going astray, passion leads man into the crooked path; vice, which is a habit, bemires him there, and he makes no progress toward the better state.

“All beings live a first life in the sphere of instinct, where they labor to discover the emptiness of earthly treasures after having taken the utmost pains to amass them. How many times does one live in this first world before leaving it prepared to submit to other tests in the sphere of abstractions where the thought expends its energy in false sciences, where the spirit grows weary at last of human speech; for when matter is exhausted, then comes spirit. Through how many forms has the being promised to heaven passed before arriving at an understanding of the price of the silence and solitude whose star-studded plains are the courtyard of the spiritual worlds! His eyes, after a sad experience of the void and nothingness, turn to the straight path. Then there are other lives to be lived in order to reach the path where the light shines. Death is the relay-house of that journey. Then one’s experiences tend in the other direction; it often requires a whole lifetime to acquire the virtues which are the opposite of the errors in which man has previously lived. Thus, first of all comes the life wherein one suffers, and whose tortures arouse a thirst for love. Then there is the life wherein one loves, wherein devotion to the creature teaches devotion to the Creator, wherein the virtues of love, its countless martyrdoms, its angelic hope, its joys followed by

sorrow, its patience, its resignation, excite the appetite for things divine. Then comes the life wherein one seeks in the silence the traces of the Word, wherein one becomes humble and charitable. Then the life wherein one desires. Lastly, the life wherein one prays. There is the everlasting South, there are the flowers, there is the harvest! The acquired qualities, which develop slowly within us, are the invisible bonds which bind our existences together, each to all the others, and which the soul alone remembers, for matter can recall nothing that is spiritual. The mind alone retains the tradition of what has gone before. That perpetual legacy of the past to the present and the present to the future is the secret of human geniuses: some have the gift of form, others the gift of number, others the gift of harmony. They are successive steps in the pathway of light. Yes, the man who possesses one of those gifts touches the infinite at one point. The Word, of which I here reveal a few words to you, that Word the earth has divided and subdivided, has ground to dust, and sown in her works, her doctrines, her poems. If some impalpable particle of it glistens upon a work, you say: 'That is great, that is true, that is sublime!' That trivial thing vibrates within you and assails the presentiment of heaven. To some, disease which separates us from the world; to others, solitude which brings us nearer God; to another, poetry—in a word, whatever turns you back upon yourselves, smites you and crushes you, exalts or degrades you, is an echo of the divine

world. When a human being has drawn his first furrow straight, that suffices to assure the straightness of the others; a single thought deeply meditated, a single voice heard, a bitter pang, a single echo awakened by the Word within you, may transform your soul forever.

“Everything leads to God; therefore there are many opportunities to find Him by walking straight before Him. When the blessed day arrives on which you set your feet upon the path and begin your pilgrimage, the earth will know nothing of it; it no longer understands you, you no longer understand each other, the earth is you. Men who attain a knowledge of these things, and who utter a few fragments of the true Word, find no place to rest their heads; they are hunted like wild beasts, and frequently perish on the scaffold to the great joy of the assembled populace, while the angels are opening the gates of heaven to them. Your destination, therefore, will be a secret between you and God, as love is a secret between two hearts. You will be the buried treasure over which men hurrying for gold pass to and fro, not knowing that you are there. Thereupon, your existence becomes full of ceaseless activity, each of your acts has a meaning which bears some relation to God, just as in love your acts and your thoughts are full of the loved one; but love with its joys, love with its pleasures, limited by the senses, is an imperfect image of the infinite love that unites you to the celestial lover. All earthly joy is followed by sorrow, by discontent; if love is to be

unmarred by satiety, death must end it when it is most intense, and then you know nothing of its ashes; but on high God transforms our misery to ecstasy, joy multiplies by itself, it grows ever greater and knows no bounds. So, in the earthly life, ephemeral love is brought to an end by constant tribulations; whereas, in the spiritual life, the tribulations of a day are brought to an end by infinite joy. Your soul ceaselessly overflows with joy. You feel that God is near you, in you; He gives to all things a savor of holiness, He shines in your soul, He stamps you with His gentleness, He destroys your interest in the world for your own sake, and arouses your interest in it for His sake, giving you His power to wield. You do in His name the works which He inspires; you wipe away tears, you act for Him, you no longer have anything of your own, like Him, you love all creatures with unquenchable love; you would like them all to be moving toward Him, as a truly loving woman would like all the nations on earth to obey her well-beloved.

“The last life, which is the summing-up of all the others, wherein all the powers are put forth and whose meritorious deeds are destined to open the sacred portal to the perfect being, is the life of prayer. Who can make you comprehend the grandeur, the majesty, the might of prayer? May my voice find an echo in your hearts and change them! Be instantly what you will be after you have undergone the tests! There have been privileged creatures, prophets, seers, messengers of God, martyrs, all those

who have suffered for the Word or proclaimed it; the souls of such men pass through the human spheres at a bound, and rise at once to prayer. So, too, with those who are devoured by the fire of faith. Be of the number of those brave souls. God suffers temerity, He loves to be taken by force, He never repels him who can find his way to Him. Be sure that desire, that torrent of your will, is so powerful in man, that a single tiny stream therefrom, emitted with force, may obtain everything, a single cry is often enough under the pressure of faith. Be of those beings, filled with force and will and love! Be of the victorious ones of earth! May the hunger and thirst for God seize upon you! Run to Him as the thirsty stag runs to the fountain; desire will provide you with its wings; tears, those flowers of repentance, will be like a celestial baptism from which your natures will come forth purified. Rise from the bosom of these waves to prayer. Silence and meditation are the efficient means to lead men to that path. God always makes Himself manifest to the solitary, meditative man. Thus will be brought to pass the necessary separation between the matter which has so long encompassed you in its darkness, and the spirit which is born in you and illumines you, for then it will shine with a clear light in your souls. Then your broken hearts will receive the light, will be inundated with it. You will no longer feel mere convictions but glorious certainties. The poet expresses his thoughts, the wise man meditates, the just man acts; but he who takes

his stand on the brink of the divine world, prays; and his prayer is speech, thought, action, all in one! Yes, his prayer comprises everything, it contains everything, it perfects your natures by discovering the spirit and its progress within you. O fair and luminous daughter of all the human virtues, ark of the covenant between heaven and earth, sweet creature, in whom the lion and the dove are united, prayer will give you the key of heaven! Bold and pure as innocence, strong like all that is single and simple, this lovely, unconquerable queen rests upon the material world, she has taken possession of it; for, like the sun, she encompasses it with a circle of light. The universe belongs to him who wills, to him who knows, to him who can pray; but he must will and know and be able, in a word, possess strength, wisdom, and faith. Thus the prayer that results from so many tests is the consummation of all truths, of all powers, of all sentiments. Fruit of the laborious, progressive, constant development of all the natural properties quickened by the divine breath of the Word, it possesses a seductive activity, it is the supreme worship: not the material worship of images, nor the spiritual worship of formulas, but the worship of the divine world. We no longer utter prayers, prayer kindles within us, it is a faculty which works by itself; it has acquired that property of activity which raises it above mere forms: it binds the soul to God, with whom you unite as the roots of trees unite with the earth; your veins draw their supplies from the principles

of things, and you live the life of the worlds themselves. Prayer imparts external conviction by enabling you to penetrate the material world by virtue of the cohesion of all your faculties with elementary substances; it imparts internal conviction by developing your essence and blending it with that of the spiritual worlds.

“In order to command prayer of this sort, you must cast aside the flesh, acquire the purity of the diamond in the heat of the crucible, for this complete communication is attained only by absolute repose, by allaying all tempests. Yes, prayer, the veritable aspiration of the soul when wholly separated from the body, seizes upon all the forces and applies them to the constant and persistent union of the visible and the invisible. Possessing the faculty of praying without weariness, with love, with force, with conviction, with intelligence, your spiritualized nature is soon endowed with power. Like a violent wind, or like the lightning, it traverses everything and shares the power of God. You have the quickness of motion of the spirit; in an instant you may be present in any country; you are transported, like the Word itself, from one end of the world to the other. There is harmony, and you contribute to it; there is a light, and you see it; there is a melody, and its accords find an echo within you. In that state, you will feel your intellect broaden and expand, and its insight reach to immense distances; in truth the spirit knows neither time nor space. Space and time are proportions created for matter; spirit and

matter have nothing in common. Although these processes are accomplished calmly and silently, without disturbance, without exterior movement, nevertheless, in prayer all is action, but earnest action, devoid of all substantiality, and reduced, like the motion of the worlds in space, to an invisible, pure force. It descends everywhere like the light, and gives life to souls which happen to be beneath its rays, as nature is beneath the sun. It revivifies virtue everywhere, purifies and sanctifies every act, peoples the solitude, affords a foretaste of everlasting bliss. When you have once known the ecstasy of divine intoxication engendered by your inward labors, then all is said! when you once hold the lyre whereon men hymn to God, you will never lay it down. Hence the solitude in which the angelic spirits live, and their disdain for the things that afford joy to mortals. I say to you, they are stricken from the number of those who are to die; if they hear their language, they no longer understand their ideas; they are amazed at their movements, at what is called politics, at their physical and social laws; for them mysteries no longer exist, they know naught but truths.

“They who have reached the point at which their eyes discern the blessed portal, and who, without a single backward glance, without a single regret, contemplate the worlds and penetrate their destinies—they hold their peace, wait, and endure their final trials; the most difficult is the last, the supreme virtue is resignation: to be in exile and to utter no

complaint, to have lost all taste for the things of earth and to smile, to belong to God and to remain among men! Plainly you hear the voice crying: 'Onward! onward!' Often in celestial visions angels descend and envelop you with their singing. Without a tear or a murmur you must watch them flying back to the hive. To complain would be to fall. Resignation is the fruit that ripens at the gate of heaven. How noble and lovely are the calm smile and untroubled brow of the resigned one! Radiant is the light that adorns her forehead! Whoever breathes the same air with her becomes a better man! Her glance is penetrating and moves the heart. More eloquent in her silence than the prophet in his speech, she triumphs by her presence alone. She pricks up her ear like the faithful dog awaiting his master's coming. Stronger than love, more ardent than hope, greater than faith, she is the adorable maiden who lies there on the ground, guarding for a moment the palm she has won, and leaving there the imprint of her pure, white feet; and, when she is no longer there, men throng to the spot, and say: 'Look!' God keeps her as a figure at whose feet the forms and species of animality crouch to seek their path. At intervals, she scatters the light that streams from her hair, and men see; she speaks, and men hear, and all say to one another: 'A miracle!' Often she triumphs in the name of God; terrified men deny her and put her to death; she sheathes her sword and goes smiling to the stake, after saving nations. How many pardoned angels have passed from martyrdom

to heaven! Sinai, Golgotha, are neither in this place nor in that; the angel is crucified in all places, in all spheres. Sighs reach God's ears from every side. The earth on which we are is one of the ears of the harvest, mankind is one of the species planted in the vast field in which the flowers of heaven are cultivated. In fine, God is everywhere the same, and, by prayer, it is easy to reach Him."

With these words, which fell as from the lips of another Hagar in the desert, but which, upon reaching the soul, stirred it to its depths like arrows discharged by the burning words of Isaiah, the strange being paused abruptly to collect her last remaining strength. Neither Wilfrid nor Minna dared to speak. Suddenly HE drew himself up to die.

"O my God, thou soul of all things, whom I love for Thyself! Judge and Father, measure an ardent love which has no measure save Thine infinite loving-kindness! Lend me Thine essence and Thy faculties that I may be more wholly Thine! Take me that I may no longer be myself. If I be not sufficiently pure, plunge me anew in the fiery furnace! If I be not of true metal, then make of me a nourishing ploughshare or a triumphant sword! Vouchsafe me some glorious martyrdom wherein I may proclaim thy Word! Reject my prayer, still will I bless Thy justness. If excess of love obtains in an instant that which is denied to patient, wearing toil, bear me away upon Thy chariot of fire! Whether Thou dost grant me the triumph or condemn me to fresh sorrows, blessed be Thy name! But to suffer for Thee—

is not that, too, a triumph? Take, seize, ravish, carry me away! Reject me, if Thou wilt! Thou art the Adored One, who can do nothing ill.—Ah!” he exclaimed, after a pause, “the bonds are breaking. Spotless spirits, sanctified flock, come forth from the abysses, fly over the surface of the waves of light! The hour has struck, come, assemble! Let us sing at the doors of the sanctuary, our singing will drive away the last-remaining clouds. Let us unite our voices to hail the dawn of the day that knows no end. Behold the breaking of the true light! Why may I not take my friends? Farewell, poor earth, farewell!”

VII

THE ASSUMPTION

These last invocations were expressed neither by word, nor by glance, nor by gesture, nor by any of the signs which men use to communicate their thoughts, but as the soul speaks to itself; for, when Seraphita exhibited herself in her real nature, on the instant, her ideas ceased to be the slaves of human words. The vehemence of her last prayer had broken the bonds. Like a white dove, her soul remained for a moment perched upon that body whose exhausted substance was on the verge of annihilation.

The aspiration of the soul heavenward was so contagious that Wilfrid and Minna did not discern death, so engrossed were they by the radiant sparks of life.

They had fallen on their knees when *he* drew himself up to turn toward his East, and they shared his ecstasy.

The fear of the Lord, which creates man anew and cleanses him of his filth, had consumed their hearts.

Their eyes were blind to earthly things, and were opened to the bright light from heaven.

Although trembling with awe at the thought of God, like some of those seers whom men call prophets, they held their ground like them when they found themselves within the ray, wherein the glory of the SPIRIT shone.

The veil of flesh which had hidden it from them hitherto, insensibly faded away and allowed them to see the divine substance.

They remained in the half-light of the breaking day whose feeble gleams prepared them to see the True Light, to hear the Living Word, and still to live.

In that state, both of them began to realize the immeasurable distance that separates the things of earth from the things of heaven.

LIFE, on whose brink they stood, pressing close to each other, trembling and illuminated, as two children stand in a sheltered spot, in the full glare of a conflagration,—life offered no attraction to the senses.

The ideas which they made use of to describe their vision to each other were to the things they saw what man's external senses may be to his soul, the material envelope of a divine essence.

The SPIRIT was above them, he perfumed the air without odor, he was melodious without the aid of sounds; where they were, were neither surfaces nor angles nor air.

They dared no longer question him or gaze upon him, and remained in his shadow as one stands in the burning rays of a tropical sun, fearing to raise one's eyes lest the sight be destroyed.

They knew that they were near him, but could not explain by what chance they were seated there, as if in a dream, on the frontier between the visible and the invisible; nor how it was that they could no longer see the visible but were able to see the invisible.

They said to themselves: "If he touches us, we shall die!" But the SPIRIT was in the Infinite, and they knew not that neither time nor space exists in the Infinite, that they were separated from him by impassable chasms, although apparently he was close at hand.

Their souls not being ready to receive in its entirety the knowledge of the faculties of that life, they had only confused perceptions of it, appropriate to their weakness.

Had it been otherwise, when the Living Word came, whose far-off sounds rang in their ears and whose meaning entered their soul as life is knit to the body, a single whisper of that Word would have absorbed them as a whirlwind of fire sweeps up a slender straw.

They saw, therefore, only what their nature, sustained by the power of the Spirit, permitted them to see; they heard only that which they could safely hear.

Despite those limitations, they shuddered when the voice of the suffering soul rang out, the hymn of the SPIRIT, awaiting life and imploring it with a cry.

That cry froze them to the very marrow of their bones.

The SPIRIT knocked at the SACRED PORTAL.

"What dost thou wish?" answered a CHOIR, whose question echoed through space.

"To go to God."

"Hast thou conquered?"

"I have conquered the flesh by abstinence, I have conquered the false word by silence, I have conquered false knowledge by humility, I have conquered pride by charity, I have conquered the earth by love, I have paid my tribute by suffering, I have purified myself in the fire of faith, I have longed for life by prayer: I wait in adoration, and I am resigned."

No reply was heard.

"Blessed be God!" exclaimed the SPIRIT, believing that he was to be cast out.

Tears flowed from his eyes and fell like a shower of dew on the two kneeling witnesses, who shuddered before the justice of God.

Suddenly the trumpets rang out for the victory won by the ANGEL in that last test, the triumphant strains rolled through space like an echo, filled it and shook the universe, which Wilfrid and Minna felt to be small beneath their feet. They trembled, suffering agony in their apprehension of the mystery about to be performed.

In truth, a great commotion took place as if the eternal legions were putting themselves in motion, arranged in spiral columns. The worlds flew round and round like clouds whirled away by a fierce wind. It was very rapid.

DEATH OF SERAPHITA

The aspiration of the soul heavenward was so contagious that Wilfrid and Minna did not discern death, so engrossed were they by the radiant sparks of life.

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Suddenly the triumphal song of the victory hymn by the ANGEL in that last test, the triumphant strains rolled through space like an echo, filled it and shook the universe, which Wilfrid and Maria felt to be small beneath their feet. They trembled, suffering agony in their apprehension of the mystery about to be performed.

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Suddenly the veils were torn aside, they saw on high something like a star,—incomparably more brilliant than the brightest of material stars,—which left its place, descended like a thunderbolt, still gleaming like the lightning-flash, and caused what they had hitherto taken for the LIGHT to grow pale.

It was the messenger who brought the glad tidings, and whose helmet bore a flame of life for a plume.

He left in his wake furrows which were instantly filled by the flood of individual rays through which he passed.

He bore a palm-branch and a sword, he touched the SPIRIT with the palm. The SPIRIT was transfigured, his white wings unfolded noiselessly.

The communication of the LIGHT which transformed the SPIRIT into a SERAPH, the putting on of his glorious form, a celestial armor, were accompanied by such dazzling rays that the two witnesses were paralyzed.

Like the three apostles to whom Jesus appeared, Wilfrid and Minna felt that the weight of their bodies forbade a complete and cloudless intuition of the WORD and the TRUE LIFE.

They realized the bareness of their souls and could measure the insignificance of their light by comparing it with the halo of the seraph in which they found themselves involved like a degrading blot upon its splendor.

They were seized with an ardent desire to plunge once more into the mire of the earth to undergo the

necessary trials there, in order that they might some day offer triumphantly at the SACRED PORTAL the words uttered by the radiant seraph.

That angel knelt before the SANCTUARY which he was able at last to behold, face to face, and said, indicating them:

“Permit them to see more. They love the Lord and will proclaim his Word.”

In response to that prayer a veil fell. Whether the unknown force which weighed upon the witnesses momentarily blotted out their corporeal forms, or caused their spirits to rise above and without them, certain it is that they felt inwardly something like a separation of the pure from the impure.

The seraph's tears rose about them in the shape of a vapor which concealed the lower worlds from them, enveloped them, bore them on, caused them to forget all earthly meanings, and gave them the power to comprehend the meaning of divine things.

The True Light appeared, it illumined all creation, which seemed a barren waste to them when they saw the spring from which the terrestrial, spiritual, and divine worlds derive motion.

Each world had a centre to which all points upon its surface converged. The worlds themselves were points converging to the centre of their systems. Each system had its centre in the direction of vast celestial regions which communicated with the flaming inexhaustible *motive power of all that is*.

Thus, from the greatest to the smallest worlds,

and from the smallest of worlds to the smallest fraction of the beings who composed it, everything had its own individuality, and yet all were one.

What was the design of that Being, unchangeable in His essence and His attributes, who transmitted them without losing them, who manifested them outside of Himself without separating from them, who rendered all those creations outside of Himself immutable in their essence and mutable in their forms? The two guests summoned to that festival could see only the order and arrangement of beings and admire only the immediate end. None but the angels could go beyond, become acquainted with the means, and understand the final end.

But that which those two elect were allowed to contemplate, that of which they brought back testimony that illumined their souls forever, was the proof of the action of worlds and beings, the knowledge of the efforts which they put forth to attain the result.

They heard the different parts of the Infinite composing one living melody; and each time that the melody made itself felt like a mighty respiration, the worlds, impelled by that unanimous movement, inclined toward the gigantic Being who, from His impenetrable centre, sent everything forth and drew everything back to Him.

This incessant alternation of voices and silence seemed to be the measure of the sacred hymn which resounded and was prolonged *in secula seculorum*.

Thereupon Wilfrid and Minna understood some of the mysterious words of the being who had appeared

to each of them on earth in the form that made him comprehensible to that one, to Minna Seraphitus, to Wilfrid Seraphita, when they saw that everything there was homogeneous.

Light gave birth to melody, melody gave birth to light, colors were light and melody, motion was number endowed with speech; in a word, everything was resonant, diaphanous, and mobile; so that as each thing penetrated every other thing, the vast expanse was unobstructed, and the angels could fly whithersoever they would in the depths of the Infinite.

They realized the puerility of the human sciences concerning which he had spoken to them.

It was to their eyes a landscape with no horizon line, an abyss into which a consuming desire forced them to plunge; but, fast bound to their wretched bodies, they had the desire without the power.

The seraph lightly spread his wings to take his flight, and no longer turned his face toward them: he had nothing more in common with the earth.

He flew upward: the vast spread of his gleaming plumage covered the two seers as with a kindly shadow, which enabled them to raise their eyes and see him borne away in his glory, attended by the joyous archangel.

He ascended like a radiant sun coming forth from the bosom of the waves; but, more majestic than the planet, and reserved for a nobler destiny, he was not to be confined, like creatures of inferior mould, to a circular life; he followed the line of the Infinite, and

held on his way without deviation toward a fixed centre, there to plunge into his everlasting life, there to receive in his faculties and in his essence the power to enjoy through love, and the gift of understanding through wisdom.

The spectacle suddenly disclosed to the eyes of the two seers crushed them beneath its immensity, for they felt that they were specks whose insignificance could be compared only to the smallest fraction which the infinity of divisibility permits man to conceive, side by side with the infinity of numbers which God alone can look upon, as He looks upon Himself.

What abasement and what grandeur in those two points, strength and love, which the seraph's first desire placed like two rings to unite the immensity of the lower spheres with the immensity of the higher spheres!

They understood the invisible bonds by which the material worlds are attached to the spiritual worlds. Recalling the sublime efforts of the noblest human geniuses, they recognized the elemental principle of melody, as they listened to the songs of heaven which imparted the sensations of colors, of perfumes, of thought, and which recalled the innumerable details of all creations, as earthly music revives an infinity of memories of love.

Having reached, by virtue of an incredible quickening of their faculties, a point for which language has no name, they were able to cast their eyes for a moment upon the divine world. There was the carnival.

Myriads of angels flew about in unison, without confusion, all alike, all different, simple as the rose of the field, immense as worlds.

Wilfrid and Minna could not see them come or take flight; they suddenly studded infinite space with their presence, as stars shine out in the invisible ether.

The sparkling of their united diadems flooded the void with light, like the flames in the sky at the moment when day is breaking among our mountains.

Waves of light flowed from their hair, and their motions caused trembling undulations like the ripples of a phosphorescent sea.

The two seers descried the seraph indistinctly amid the immortal legions whose wings were like the immense plumage of a forest swayed by the breeze.

Instantly, as if all the arrows from a quiver were discharged at once, the spirits swept away with a breath all vestiges of his former shape; as the seraph ascended, he became purer; soon he seemed to them no more than a faint outline of what they had seen when he was transfigured: an outline of fire casting no shadow.

As he rose, from circle to circle he received a new gift; then the symbol of his election was transmitted to the superior sphere, toward which he ascended, growing ever purer.

None of the voices were silent, the hymn was diffused through space in all its variations.

“Hail to him who ascends living! Come hither, flower of the worlds! diamond purged by the fire of

sorrow! spotless pearl, chaste desire, a new bond between heaven and earth, be thou light! O conquering spirit, queen of the world, fly to thy crown! Thou who hast triumphed over earth, receive thy diadem! Be ours!"

The virtues of the angel reappeared in their beauty.

His first longing for heaven reappeared, graceful as blooming childhood.

His acts, like constellations, adorned him with their splendor.

His acts of faith shone forth resplendent, like the hyacinth of heaven, the color of the stars' fire.

Charity tossed him its oriental pearls, lovely garnered tears.

The divine love surrounded him with its roses, and his pious resignation, by virtue of its snowy whiteness, took from him every vestige of earth.

In the eyes of Wilfrid and Minna he soon became a mere speck of flame which glowed brightly, while its movement was lost in the melodious acclamation that welcomed his entrance into heaven.

The celestial strains brought tears to the eyes of the two outcasts.

Suddenly a deathly silence, which spread like a dark veil from the first to the last sphere, threw Wilfrid and Minna into a state of indescribable suspense.

At that moment, the seraph disappeared in the bosom of the Sanctuary, where he received the gift of life everlasting.

There was a movement of profound adoration which filled the hearts of the two seers with ecstasy mingled with terror.

They felt that everyone fell prostrate in the divine spheres, in the spiritual spheres, and in the worlds of darkness.

The angels bent the knee in honor of his glory, the spirits bent the knee in testimony of their impatience; the denizens of the dark abysses bent the knee, shuddering with terror.

A loud shout of joy gushed forth as from a spring that has been choked up and begins anew to send forth its myriads of sparkling sheaf-like jets, wherein the sun plays, studding the luminous waves with diamonds and with pearls; and at the same moment, the seraph reappeared, blazing with light, and cried:

“ETERNAL! ETERNAL! ETERNAL!”

The worlds heard him and recognized him; he pierced them as God pierces them, and took possession of the Infinite.

The seven divine worlds were stirred by his voice and answered him.

At that moment, there was a great commotion as if whole stars, purified, were ascending in clouds of dazzling light to become eternal.

Mayhap the seraph had received for his first mission the duty of calling to God the creations reached by the Word.

But already the sublime ALLELUIA rang in Wilfrid's and Minna's ears like the last echo of a melody that is ended.

Already the celestial beams were fading like the brilliant tints of the sun when he sinks to rest in his swaddling-clothes of purple and gold.

Impurity and death seized their prey once more.

Returning to the bonds of the flesh from which their spirits had been momentarily set free by a sublime slumber, the two mortals felt as one feels in the morning following a night crowded with brilliant dreams, the memory of which still hovers in the soul, although the body is not conscious of them, and human language is powerless to describe them.

The profound darkness in which they then found themselves was the sphere in which the sun of the visible worlds revolves.

"Let us descend," said Wilfrid to Minna.

"Let us do what he bade us do," she replied. "After seeing whole worlds in motion toward God, we know the straight path. Our starry diadems are above."

They went down into the dark depths, re-entered the dust of the inferior worlds, and suddenly espied the Earth like a subterranean mass, illuminated by the light which they bore in their souls, and which still surrounded them with a cloud wherein were reflected dimly the fading harmonies of heaven. The spectacle was the same that long ago met the inward eyes of the prophets. Ministers of diverse creeds, all alleged to be true, kings all consecrated by power and dread, warriors and great men portioned out the nations by mutual consent, learned and rich towering above the suffering, tumultuous populace, and

crushing them beneath their feet: all were attended by their wives and servants, all were clad in robes of gold, silver, or azure, bedecked with pearls and precious stones torn from the bowels of the earth, from the depths of ocean, for which mankind had long spent its energies, sweating and blaspheming. But all that wealth and splendor built with blood were like old rags and tatters in the eyes of the two outcasts.

“Why stand ye there, in motionless lines?” cried Wilfrid.

They made no reply.

“Why stand ye there, in motionless lines?”

They made no reply.

Wilfred laid his hands upon them and cried:

“Why stand ye there, in motionless lines?”

With a simultaneous movement they all put aside their robes and displayed their withered bodies, eaten by worms, corrupt, crumbling to dust, ravaged by horrible diseases.

“You lead the nations to death,” said Wilfrid to them. “You have debased the earth, perverted the Word, prostituted justice. Having eaten the grass in the pastures, you turn now upon the lambs and slaughter them! Do you deem yourselves justified in displaying your sores? I shall warn those of my brethren who can still hear the Voice, so that they may go and allay their thirst at the springs which you have hidden.”

“Let us reserve our strength for prayer,” said Minna; “your mission is not that of the prophets,

nor of the righter of wrongs, nor of God's messenger. As yet, we are only upon the borders of the first sphere, let us try to cross the intervening space upon the wings of prayer."

"You shall be all my love!"

"You shall be all my strength!"

"We have been vouchsafed a glimpse of the exalted mysteries; we are, each to the other, the only beings on earth to whom joy and sorrow are comprehensible; therefore let us pray; we know the road, let us walk in it."

"Give me your hand," said the maiden; "if we walk always together, the way will be less hard and less long to me."

"With none but you," replied the man, "can I pass through the vast solitude without indulging myself in a complaint."

"And we will go to heaven together," said she.

The clouds gathered and formed a dark canopy. Suddenly the two lovers found themselves kneeling beside a body which old David was guarding against all curious eyes, and which he was determined to bury with his own hands.

Without, the first summer of the nineteenth century was bursting forth in its magnificence. The two lovers fancied that they heard a voice in the sunbeams. They inhaled the perfume of a celestial spirit in the new-born flowers, and said to each other, hand in hand:

"That boundless ocean gleaming below us in the sunlight is an image of what we saw above."

“Where are you going?” Monsieur Becker asked them.

“We are going to God,” they replied: “Come with us, father.”

Geneva and Paris, December 1833–November 1835.

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